

PURSUING
OTHERNESS
AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC
STUDY ON
DARK PROXIMITY
TOURISM IN
VIITASAARI



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Abstract

Throughout history, places related to death have lured visitors. Dark tourism is not a new phenomenon and academic interest towards death-related places is not novel either. Dark tourism, however, provides a vast area of research and opportunities for continuous discoveries. Utilizing local death-related Finnish folk belief tradition in dark tourism practices is a novel approach this study adopts.

This autoethnographic study examines endeavor to practice dark proximity tourism through death-related myths and legends on the Old Church Island Cemetery in Viitasaari. The study aims to provide nuanced and intimate insights into pursuing Otherness in one's proximate environment. Furthermore, the study aims to contribute to understanding small-scale non-commercialized lived dark proximity tourism experiences. The empirical data consists of fieldnotes reflectively describing and discussing the process of pursuing Otherness, as well as, the two lived dark proximity tourism experiences that took place during the research process. In the analysis part of the study, autoethnographic accounts written based on the field notes aim to describe the dark proximity tourism phenomenon in a fundamental and revealing manner. Alongside the autoethnographic accounts presented, particularly emotions, senses, feelings, embodiment, thoughts related to dark proximity tourism as well as expressions referring to one's meaning-making process are analyzed in the light of hermeneutic phenomenology.

The findings indicate that dark proximity tourism practices can be multifaceted and encompass various relations with death as well as offer tremendous emotional experiences. Through adopting a different mindset and attributing difference ideologically a cemetery in one's proximate surroundings may turn into a place where Otherness can be experienced, and tourism practices implemented. Attributing differences ideologically may be a far-reaching process that establishes an emotional connection towards the place as well as shapes the place identity. Around us, dozens of unheard stories exist, and discovering them, may help us to see our familiar environment in a new light and as alluring for implementing tourism practices.

Keywords: dark tourism, proximity tourism, cemetery tourism, autoethnography, emotional experience, place identity

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1. Introduction

Humans are dynamic, unpredictable, and constantly changing beings – likewise, human societies are dynamic and unpredictable (Jones, Adams & Ellis, 2013, p. 26). The epoch we live in has introduced novel hazards, unforeseen situations, and rapid environmental changes to the people throughout the world (Berglund, Lounela & Kallinen, 2019, p. 8). These rapid changes and erratic nature of the contemporary world may lead people to reflect their travel behaviors in a new light. Dynamic societies drift apart from old, traditional mindsets and patterns of doing and feeling things (Lazarus, 1991, p. 350).

Thus, in the contemporary world where endless amounts of stimulus and opportunities for traveling have existed already for quite some time, looking at our vicinity might not be a bad idea. Already around us, dozens of unheard stories exist. The context of sustainable tourism may encourage people to support proximity tourism in the future even though traditionally tourism Otherness has been associated to geographical distance and traveling away from the everyday life (Jeuring & Haartsen, 2017, p. 118). Jeuring and Diaz-Soria (2017, p. 5) state that it is possible to experience unfamiliarity and Otherness in the proximity of the home environment as well. However, when the line between everyday life and tourism becomes vague, rethinking what is exotic and what is mundane is needed. There are studies indicating that proximity tourism destinations can be seen attractive, when the visitor adapts a mindset of distancing oneself from the ordinary, exist (see Jeuring & Haartsen, 2017; Diaz-Soria, 2016). The need to escape mundane has probably always existed (Seaton, 2009, p. 81).

Dark tourism might be one potential steppingstone towards finding unfamiliarity and Otherness at the proximity of one's home environment. According to Lennon and Foley (2000, p. 3), there is empirical evidence indicating that tourist's interest in death, disaster, and atrocity has been increasing especially in the late 20th and in the 21st century. Visiting sites connected to death such as death sites, cemeteries, mausoleums, is part of tourism experience in various societies. The term dark tourism was coined by Foley and Lennon (1996a; see also 1996b) to refer to phenomena where places of death, disaster, and atrocity are visited. Tourism sites related to death have been alluring visitors throughout history (Sharpley, 2005, pp. 217–228), and the interest towards visiting sites of death and contemplation of death can

be traced back to the Middle Ages (Seaton, 1996, p. 235). Stone (2006, p. 147) states that Roman gladiator games can be thought of as one of the very first dark tourism attractions where suffering and death were the core of the event. Attending public executions in the past can be also considered as an early form of dark tourism (Sion, 2014, p. 1).

This thesis brings together concepts of dark tourism and proximity tourism by following my endeavor to practice dark proximity tourism on the Old Church Island Cemetery in Viitasaari. Furthermore, the thesis aims to understand dark proximity tourism experience in more detail through utilizing autoethnography as a research method. In this study, dark proximity tourism is examined through a place of potential, which is the Old Church Island Cemetery (In Finnish Vanhan Kirkkosaaren hautausmaa / Viitasaaren hautausmaa).

1.1 Cemetery enthusiast: Positioning the researcher

According to Finnish mythology, the first person buried in the churchyard turned into a church-occupant. The church-occupant was a frightening figure who possessed the ability to command the dead. Over time, the names of the church-occupants have faded into oblivion. In Viitasaari, narratives of a church-occupant with the name Liisa Iiro have been recorded...

(Harva, 2018, pp. 501–502)

The story above was the starting point for this study. When I ran into this story, I felt like I had just found out something extraordinary about my hometown. As a cemetery enthusiast as well as folklore enthusiast I immediately thought that the story was meaningful. Something worth looking into. The story functioned as a trigger so that I was able to see my hometown in a new light and to start to implement my ideal ways of practicing tourism in my proximate environment. Inspired by the story above, I decided to practice dark tourism in my proximate environment and to discover death-related stories of the Old Church Island Cemetery.

I lived in Viitasaari for more than twenty years before moving to another city for studying. Now, while I am writing this thesis, I am once again back in Viitasaari. There seem to be many stories and new interesting places to discover in my near surroundings now that I am older and hopefully wiser. Furthermore, during the years I have been absent, I have

discovered many new fields of interest. Death, cemeteries, folklore, and myths have fascinated me already for a considerably long time. It is hard to say when it all began but the interest seems to be here to stay. When I have traveled abroad, I have nearly always included visiting a cemetery in my travel plan. Visiting cemeteries has, thus, most certainly become “my thing”. Not always the cemetery visits were premeditated, but once I happened to notice a cemetery while wandering around, I felt an immense urge to visit. Especially the hustle and bustle of city life drives me to look for peaceful places if I am on long-term travel. Cemeteries have fulfilled this purpose repeatedly. Even though I appreciate such features as fascinating gravestones, landscapes, and monuments, they rarely serve as the main motivation for the visit for me. I seek the unique atmosphere, spirituality, as well as space of contemplation and retreat, cemeteries tend to provide for me. Space where my mind is free to wander.

I have participated in a few guided tours in cemeteries, but it seems I tend to prefer being alone and taking my time instead of being a part of a group. I have also noticed that I am not particularly interested in graves of remarkable people and their life stories or accomplishments. Rather, I am interested in myths, folklore, unnatural deaths, and macabre stories starring villains, heroes, and victims. Also, stories related to deceased ordinary people, shared by their loved ones at cemeteries seem to affect me. Hearing these kinds of stories requires, however, being at the right place at the right time, and hearing them is rather rare. Experience of visiting a cemetery can be multifaceted. Soothing yet unsettling. Exciting yet soul-crushing. Full happiness yet full of wrath. Full of sadness yet full of gratitude.

For some reason, I had not thought about the Old Church Island Cemetery in Viitasaari as a potential destination for visiting before. Maybe because I had lived in Viitasaari most of my life. Sometimes it is hard to see all the things right next to our everyday living environment without a conscious change of mindset. For my embarrassment, I must admit that I had never visited the Old Church Island Cemetery before this thesis process. I knew that there was a cemetery on the Island but that was all I knew. I wish I had gone through the effort of discovering local stories earlier since multiple times the ludicrous sentence “that's all, there is pretty much nothing else to see in here” has escaped my lips when I have brought visitors from elsewhere to my hometown. Now that I have discovered more about my near surroundings – I admit the statement was awfully unjust.

1.2 Viitasaari and the Old Church Island Cemetery

This chapter presents the empirical context of the study. The Old Church Island Cemetery and the myths and legends related to the cemetery will be discussed in more detail in the analysis chapter.

Viitasaari is a lively rural city located in central Finland which is surrounded by lake Keitele. According to the Association of Finnish Municipalities (2019), the population of Viitasaari was 6264 in 2019. The beautiful nature of Viitasaari and annual events such as Time of Music and TraktoriJatzit provide exquisite opportunities to spend vacation (Viitasaari – Koskien ja järvien kaupunki, n. d.).

Viitasaari was part of the grand parish of Rautalammi before it became an independent parish in 1635 (Markkanen, 2019, p. 211). The oldest cemetery of Viitasaari was established in the 1590s (Viitasaaren Hautausmaa, n.d.) in an island nowadays known by the name “the Old Church Island” (see Figure 1). Nowadays burials, excluding burials to old family graves, are performed very rarely on the Old Church Island Cemetery due to the location (Viitasaaren Hautausmaa, n. d.).

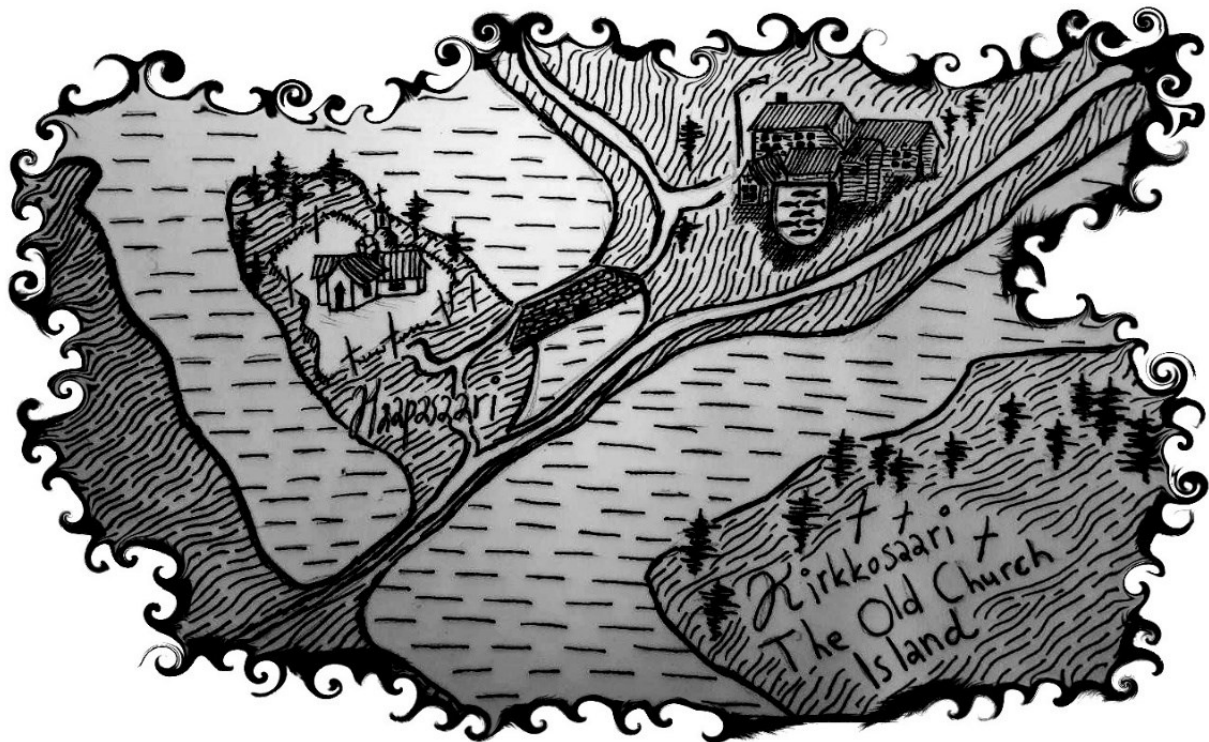


Figure 1. Illustrative map of Viitasaari (Linnakoski, 2020).

According to Jalkanen (1900/2010, p. 199) when the number of churches was still rather limited in Rautalammi parish, it was infeasible to take bodies of the deceased to the church due to the long distances. Therefore, it was not common to bury the deceased in burial grounds that did not belong to the church. The priest would, however, visit these burial grounds surreptitiously and bless the graves. Usually, these burial grounds were located on quiet, unoccupied islands since according to the Finnish belief tradition the souls of the deceased could not leave the island to haunt the living.

The first modest church or rather a chapel of the parish of Rautalammi was built in the Old Church Island of Viitasaari (Markkanen, 1983, pp. 209–211). According to Snellman (1897, as cited in Markkanen, 1983, pp. 209), the church was built in 1593. Markkanen (1983, pp. 210–211) explains that building a church to the Old Church Island alleviated participating in church activities since traveling all the way to Rautalammi was no longer required. A chaplain traveled occasionally from Laukaa to Viitasaari to conduct sacred rituals such as burials, christenings, and matrimony ceremonies. In the 1620s the first chaplain moved to Viitasaari and, thus, Viitasaari had an own priest for the very first time.

Markkanen (1983, pp. 281–298) explains that the second church was built, similarly in the Old Church Island, in 1653. At that time, superstitions, old folk beliefs, and paganism were still rather common even though the church condemned these unholy practices. The superstitious rituals and old folk traditions were, nonetheless, pursued still throughout the 1700s in the area.

According to Markkanen (1983, pp. 547–549), the third church was built in 1776 and after around one hundred years the church was relocated to Haapasaari. Nowadays the same church, even though partly altered, still serves parishioners in Haapasaari, the mainland of Viitasaari. The first burials to the Haapasaari cemetery were conducted in 1877 (Haapasaaren hautausmaa, n.d.). The remains of the church's wine cellar in the Old Church Island Cemetery yet indicate the old location of the church (Markkanen, 1983, p. 547).

1.3 Previous research

During the past few decades, academic interest in dark tourism has increased and extensive amount of literature has been published (Martini & Buda, 2020, p. 680). Dark tourism phenomenon has been also discussed in academic literature for instance through definitions of “black spots” (see Rojek, 1993), “morbid tourism” (see Blom, 2000), thanatourism (see Seaton, 1996) and “dark heritage” (see Biran, Poria & Oren, 2011). Furthermore, different typologies of dark tourism have been developed to understand the various dimensions of the phenomenon (see Lennon & Foley, 2000; Seaton, 1996; Sharpley, 2009; Stone, 2006). According to Stone (2006, p. 146), justifying the categorization of different types of dark tourism sites is nonetheless considered challenging since the range of different sites connected to death and suffering is constantly increasing in contemporary society. The definition of dark tourism is rather complex and ambiguous (Dale & Robinson, 2011, p. 215). Light (2017, p. 293) states that there is no consensus on definitions of dark tourism and thanatourism. Some scholars even apply the definition of dark tourism to places and experiences which lack apparent relation to death.

According to Light (2017, pp. 276–277), the term thanatourism is often used as a synonym for dark tourism. However, different scholars have argued that there are distinctions between the two. Seaton (1996, p. 240) coined the term thanatourism to describe “travel to a location wholly, or partially, motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death”. Thus, one’s fascination with death and motives are central elements of thanatourism. Dark tourism term, on the other hand, is a hypernym for tourism-related to death, suffering, atrocity, tragedy or crime at any level and, therefore, dark tourism is not such a specific and definite concept as thanatourism (Light, 2017, p. 277).

Seaton (1996, pp. 240–244), developed five thanatourism travel categories, which emphasizes behavioral and motivational aspects as well as one’s fascination with death while traveling to confront death. These categories include travel to attend to public enactment of death, travel to view mass or individual death sites, travel to visit memorial sites et cetera, travel to examine symbolical depictions and material evidence of death, as well as travel to behold recreations and simulations of death. Motives for thanatourism commonly exist alongside other motives and in the end, personal, nationalistic, and humanitarian feelings may play a bigger

role than a fascination with death itself. In the past fascination with death was more openly admitted than in the 20th century where prevailing moral discourse presents dark tourism rather in the form of heritage, education, or history. Walter (2009) argues that examining motives of visitors only explain visits to dark tourism sites rather superficially. Documenting how visiting dark tourism sites affect individuals in the long run and conceptualizing what visitors do at the dark tourism sites may be more worthwhile than concentrating on motives purely.

In this study, the motivation to encounter death is neither the ultimate baseline for the study nor the only core value scrutinized, and therefore, the umbrella term dark tourism is applied in this study. However, the concept of thanatourism is not completely cast aside in the study. Thanatourism and dark tourism have such a close connection that considering only one of the concepts, in the end, is challenging (Light, 2017, p. 277). This study primarily seeks to gain insights and understand the dark proximity tourism experience holistically. Thus, motivation and the fascination with death as well as heritage tourism are also inevitably part of this autoethnographic study. For, there seems to be a thin line between dark tourism and heritage tourism. According to Light (2017, pp. 275–279), different scholars have argued whether dark tourism and thanatourism have features that can distinguish the concepts from heritage tourism. Making a clear difference between the three seems problematic. Furthermore, concepts of dark tourism and thanatourism are not universally accepted and some scholars have sought a redefinition of dark tourism through different types of heritage tourism (see Logan & Reeves, 2009).

Considering cemetery tourism, which is a subcomponent of dark tourism, as a form of dark tourism instead of heritage tourism also divides opinions. Regarding cemeteries, the line between dark tourism and heritage tourism seems shady and visitors' motives and experience play a crucial role. Pliberšek and Vrban (2018, p. 194) argue that dark tourism experience in cemetery tourism can be secondary since other experiences, such as experiences related to cultural heritage, play a remarkable role in cemetery tourism. Many scholars, however, acknowledge the phenomenon of dark tourism while discussing cemetery tourism (see for example Millán, Naranjo, Rojas, and Vazquez de la Torre, 2019; Pliberšek & Vrban, 2018; Sharpley, 2005; Stone, 2006; Stone, 2016).

Millán, Naranjo, Rojas and Vazquez de la Torre (2019, p. 5) suggest that visiting cemeteries can be considered as cultural tourism in cases where the main motivation of the visitor is connected to funerary heritage. However, motivations of visitors wandering in cemeteries vary from admiring artistical and architectural heritage to enthusiasm to discover gruesome tales of violent deaths. Pliberšek and Vrban (2018, p. 207) state that acknowledging the difference between cemeteries as dark tourism sites and cultural tourism sites is important since cemeteries should not be considered only as dead related sites. There is extensive literature regarding usage, purpose, and design of cemeteries from the perspective of anthropology, archeology, sociology, and history (Woodthorpe, 2011, p. 259). Also, extensive amounts of pieces of work where stories of people once buried in cemeteries are introduced exist (e.g. MacThomais, 2012; Stanton, 2003). For example, the book called “The Tombstone Tourist: Musicians” written by Scott Stanton (2003) contains a catalog of dead musicians and the locations of their memorials.

A study concerning motivations and experiences of Finnish cemetery tourists visiting the Norvajärvi German cemetery exists. A study made by Koskinen-Koivisto (2016, pp. 23–42), discusses the Norvajärvi cemetery that has a connection to the dreadful past of the Lapland War and the Second World War. The study indicated that visiting Norvajärvi German cemetery provided spiritual experiences and prompted visitors to reflect their mortality and meaning of death. Furthermore, the visit deepened visitors’ knowledge of historical events. Correspondingly, Dermody (2017, pp. 195–196) has argued that visit to dark tourism sites is related to self-reflection of one’s death, death of persons related to oneself, and handling grief.

When discovering one’s immediate surroundings the concept of proximity tourism steps into the picture. There are tourism studies in the context of Finland indicating that one’s proximate surroundings can be explored in innovative ways and through novel perspectives (e.g. Rantala, Salmela, Valtonen & Höckert; 2020; Salmela & Valtonen, 2019). Salmela and Valtonen (2019) describe ways of being and knowing through a more-than-human walking methodology. Salmela and Valtonen (2019) have proposed the “walking with multiple others” approach to understand and to find one’s place within a more-than-human collectivity. The approach suggests that more-than-human collectivity can be known-with through focusing on being, envisioning, and being attentive to the more-than-human collectivities. Rantala, Salmela, Valtonen & Höckert (2020) have studied the potential of the proximate environment through geological walks in Finnish Lapland. The empirical example explores, among other

things, how in geotourism stories and myths may charge more-than-human collectivities with “liveness” once one sensitizes oneself for the environment through stories and knowledge.

The Finnish cultural history of death has been rather widely researched (see Lehtikoinen, 2011; Pajari, Jalonen, Miettinen & Kanerva, 2019). Also, the myths and Finnish folklore related to death have aroused academic interest (see Harva, 2018; Koski, 2011; Pulkkinen, 2014). Harva (2018, p. 488) states that death has always been a tremendous mystery to mankind and the vague belief towards the afterlife of some sort has remained from ancient times until today. Throughout history, several myths have formed around death and afterlife and deathbed (Fenwick & Fenwick, 2008, pp. 9–10). Dermody (2017, p. 207) argues that a multidisciplinary approach in studying dark tourism is preferable, and studying further sociology of death, grief, and bereavement offers the possibility to understand how the sites mediate death. According to Lehtikoinen (2011, pp. 12–13) differences in the Finnish anthropology of death have existed depending on the region and period. Christianity and the perceptions towards death the Christianity provided did not take over all the areas of Finland simultaneously. Findings are indicating that Christian burials were practiced on the west coast already around the 11th century. However, the remote areas still adhered to pagan rituals to escort the deceased to the afterlife.

1.4 Purpose of the study

When dark tourism is discussed in academic literature, usually only extensive and commercialized dark tourism is considered. Small-scale, non-commercial, and not for profit dark tourism has not yet studied from many perspectives. Not all dark tourism sites revolve around the commoditization of death (Korstanje & Baker, 2018). Moreover, empirical studies concentrating on tourist perspective, experience, and consuming dark tourism sites are still rather scarce (Zhang, Yang, Zheng & Zhang, 2016, p. 252) as well as are studies concentrating on the felt experience of dark tourism (Martini & Buda, 2020, p. 680). Construction of place meaning from the dark tourism site visitors’ angle has not been widely researched either (Biran, Poria & Oren, 2011; Zheng, Zhang, Qiu, Guo & Zhang, 2019).

Light (2017) has examined the research progress of dark tourism and thanatourism in his rather recent academic article. The article argues that future dark tourism research should not

prioritize developing new typologies but should instead focus more for example on broader visitor experiences in a different range of sites while considering expectations, anticipation, and post-visit reflection. Moreover, ethical dilemmas visitors face during their visit, perspectives of the local community as well as on long term impacts of the visit on visitors call for further research. Furthermore, there are still visitor groups who are not widely recognized in the previous studies. Members of local communities who may value exceedingly different meanings compared to other visitor groups are one example of unrecognized visitor groups.

Furthermore, recently the need to utilize new methodologies in dark tourism research has been advocated (see Light, 2017; Korstanje, 2017). Light (2017, p. 295) explains that new methodologies to directly engage with the visitors of the places of death and suffering are needed. Podoshen, Andrzejewski, Venkatesh & Wallin (2015, p. 334) have pointed out that utilizing multiple methodologies and interdisciplinary is beneficial in furthering dark tourism studies.

Therefore, based on the afore identified research gaps and call for the need for new methodologies, this study contributes to dark tourism studies as well as proximity tourism studies by focusing on small-scale dark proximity tourism and utilizing autoethnography. The focus of the study is on holistic dark proximity tourism experience and finding Otherness in one's proximate environment. The study seeks to answer the following main research question: **What kind of lived experience dark proximity tourism is?**

The main research question is divided into the following sub-research questions:

RQ1: How Otherness can be pursued in one's immediate proximity?

RQ2: How place meanings are constructed during the lived experience?

RQ3: What kind of emotions dark proximity tourism evokes?

This qualitative study employs hermeneutic phenomenology as a research paradigm. Phenomenology examines the essence of lived personal experiences reflexively and in-depth while attempting to discover and explain the meaning structures related to the experiences (Van Manen, 1990, pp. 10–11). The hermeneutic approach, on the other hand, advocates interpretative holistic understanding while considering different contexts such as history and culture (Patton, 2002, pp. 114–115). Hermeneutic phenomenology brings together the features

of phenomenology and hermeneutics. According to Kafle (2011), the hermeneutic phenomenology paradigm focuses on the subjective experiences of individuals or groups as well as inherent meanings expressed in their stories and pursues to understand, interpret and explain the world of individuals just as they realize it. Hermeneutic phenomenology suggests that reality is subjectively constructed yet dependent on different contexts and meanings. Thus, the ontology of hermeneutic phenomenology suggests that multiple realities exist. Epistemology sets subjective knowledge in centric position and, therefore, the keys for gaining knowledge are believed to be in insights, reflexivity, and experiences of an individual.

1.5 Autoethnography

Autoethnography has the potential to provide complex, nuanced, and intimate insight about specific experiences, lives, and relationships (Adams et al., 2015, pp. 21–23), and, thus, autoethnography was adopted as a method for this study. Autoethnographic accounts provided at the discussion and analysis chapter of the study aims to describe the phenomenon of dark proximity tourism in a revealing and nuanced manner. The autoethnographic accounts provided were drafted on the base of the fieldnotes taken during different phases of the endeavor to practice dark tourism in one's immediate surroundings. The fieldnotes are the empirical data of the study. Autoethnography describes life and living by emphasizing storytelling, artfulness, and embodied experiences in a way where there is room left for the reader to contemplate and develop a better understanding of complexity and differences (Jones et al., 2013, p. 25). The first chapter of the analysis and discussion section provides an autoethnographic account related to the process of seeking Otherness through death-related myths and legends in one's proximate environment as well as discusses the process analytically. The second chapter of the analysis and discussion section presents autoethnographic accounts concerning the two lived dark proximity tourism experiences that took place during the research process as well as discusses the lived experiences analytically. The third chapter of the analysis and discussion section presents autoethnographic accounts while discussing the emotions and meaning-making processes that took place during the process of pursuing Otherness, lived experiences and post-experience.

Autoethnography has the potential to break the silence and empower disregarded voices (Adams, Jones & Ellis, 2015, p. 36) as well as illustrate the meanings of human experiences as well as moral and ethical choices people face in erratic and constantly changing world (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 744). Through autoethnography, disregarded cultural experiences may be presented in a new light so that unique, surprising, as well as problematic sides can be presented to the reader (Jones et al., p. 25). Moreover, autoethnography wields power to promote social change by encouraging the reader to take a new direction based on the insights the research has presented (Adams et al., p. 36). Already choosing the topic of this thesis was a conscious decision and aspire to promote social change. Through choosing the topic of dark proximity tourism in Viitasaari I wanted to prove, particularly to myself, that there inevitably are unheard and fascinating stories right next to us worth hearing. That is, I wanted to advocate proximity tourism and endeavor of adopting a different mindset.

1.6 The structure of the study

The first chapter gave a general overview of the study, justified the research cap as well as utilizing autoethnography as a method, and explained the empirical phenomenon under scrutiny. The second chapter examines dark tourism experience, dark tourism and emotions as well as cemetery tourism in more detail. The third chapter discusses proximity tourism while focusing specifically on aspects of finding Otherness in one's proximate environment as well as on matters of place identity. In the fourth chapter, the methodologies used in the study are justified and explained in more detail. Furthermore, the ethical issues related to the study are discussed. The fifth chapter presents the findings of the study while discussing the context within which the interpretation of empirical data has taken place. Furthermore, the chapter argues the research findings through theoretical concepts of dark tourism and proximity tourism. The sixth chapter contains the conclusions of the research findings, evaluation of the study, and lastly discusses future research prospects.

2. Experiencing dark tourism in emotionally laden places

This chapter provides the conceptual framework related to dark tourism and emotions, dark tourism experience, and cemetery tourism. Before proceeding to literature reviews, it is essential to explain shortly how the place, space, time, emotions, and lived experience relate to each other. Emotions, experience, and sense of place are strongly intertwined, and understanding the relations between the three is crucial, and when examining the holistic dark proximity tourism experience.

In the light of hermeneutic phenomenology paradigm, this study adopts the outlines of a phenomenological understanding of the place and space described by Casey (1996), which emphasizes the role of lived experience and perception. Casey suggests that space might be posterior to place and even extracted from the place, implying that place is a general concept whereas space is more of a specific concept. Time and space become operative in places through lived experiences. The place is concrete whereas space and time are abstract and relational. Perceiving and being in a specific place as a sentient subject, are the factors that turn the general into specific.

Casey (1996) explains that the perception of place fundamentally happens through lived experience when place and body influence one another. That is, places do not just simply exist physically, they happen. The lived experience takes place through a subject that perceives things via the subject's qualities and by reflecting these qualities. Thus, bodily perceiving is a complex synesthetic process where sentient, affective, knowing, and moving body of the individual is the core. Emotions are evident part of the process of perceiving since emotions move the sentient body as well as inherently connect and attach the sentient body to things, places, and others in varying intensity (Ahmed, 2004, pp. 27–31). According to Damasio (1999, p. 52) emotions take place in conscious bodies that can perceive emotions and feel them. Thus, the cycles where emotions followed by feelings trigger thoughts and behavioral patterns. Feelings, therefore, can arouse one's interest and enable the hermeneutic process (Schorch, 2014, p. 32) in the knowing subject. Simply put, emotions are a collection of outward-directed observable responses that work as foundations for feelings that are inward-directed intimate mental experiences of emotions requiring elucidation of the subject itself (Damasio, 1999, pp. 36–42; Damasio, 2003, pp. 28–29).

According to Casey (1996), knowledge is an intrinsic element of the perception, and embodied knowledge enables understanding the felt properties and cultural traits of lived experience. That is, social and cultural structures as well as memories and thoughts are components that accompany the sentient subject to different places. However, places are not inactive itself either. Rather, places gather experiences, expectations, histories, memories, thoughts as well as all other things related to the life of a sentient human being, and release these when the lived experience takes place. Places encompass familiar and unfamiliar as well as old and the new. Places are dynamic, relational, and regenerating and even though we return to the place as if it is the same place, in the end, it is still not the same place. Social and cultural structures set the primary level for the perception (Casey, 1996), and rather similarly, emotions can be socially shared (Ahmed, 2004, p. 26) and might partially set the entry levels for the perception. In the end, the process of perceiving, as well as lived experience, therefore, intertwines social with the personal.

2.1 Dark tourism experience: “Living the past” through sentient body

Light (2017, p. 281) has pointed out that visitors experience dark tourism sites rather differently and subjectively and, therefore, the dark tourism sites may have myriad different meanings. Dark tourism experience is not solely about death and dying but rather about mortality narratives, education, entertainment, memorialization, moral instructions, and contemplating mortality (Stone, 2012, p. 1582). Knudsen (2017) states that dark tourism is about connecting with the past through affect and physically embodying something that no longer exists. Knudsen describes the emotional aspects of dark tourism through the concept of “liveness”, where the visitor engages with the feeling of being part of the past events. The past is felt and dealt with through the body of the visitor (Knudsen, 2011, pp. 58–59).

According to Knudsen (2011, pp. 58–59), witnessing the past is embodied practice that takes place through numerous mediated experiences. Knowledge is sensed, understood, and perceived through the sentient body of a tourist. Furthermore, landscape and tourism design also intertwine with the witnessing process. The emotional and affective impacts of past events on the visitor are centric in the witnessing process. However, the intensity level greatly varies depending on the visitor's level of engagement, responses, and felt a sense of responsibility.

Craig and Thompson (2012, p. 183) argue that a person's past, connection to the event under scrutiny, the traveling company as well as personality influence the dark tourism experience. Also, time and reflection can re-shape one's understanding of past events. The world view of contemporary people greatly differs from our ancestors and for example violence can be perceived rather differently in the contemporary world. That is, the liaison between the living and the dead is dynamic as well as relational which contributes to emerging of new sets of socio-cultural practices and altering rituals, affective ambiances, emotional geographies, and performances (Light & Young, 2016, p. 61).

Stone (2011, p. 27) states that in contemporary society where death has shifted to the hands of professionals and medicals, dark tourism mediates between life and death by offering filtered extraordinary deaths for consumption thus connecting the living and the death. Millán et al. (2019, p. 2) explain that unnatural death and tragedies which we hope to avoid in the future are often presented in dark tourism. It is inevitable that direct connection between the visitor and death in avail, however, does not exist. Craig and Thompson (2012, p. 183) state that many of the morbid events that dark tourism sites utilize are connected to breaking norms that contemporary society treasures such as freedom of speech, equality, and human rights. This arouses curiosity since violating these norms is not mundane. It could be said that dark tourism provides "mortality moments" in a safe environment and distance, which allows individuals to reflect mortality and death (Stone & Sharpley, 2008, p. 589).

Stone and Sharpley (2008) have explored consumption aspects of dark tourism through the sociology of death and more specifically by exploring death and contemplation of death in contemporary societies. In the end, dark tourism might rather be more about living than death and dying since dark tourism guides individuals, within the social structure, to reflect personal meaningfulness, the sense of continuity of life, mortality, and well-being. Motives of dark tourists are, however, complex and vary within different social networks. Furthermore, the intensity of dark tourism depends on the individual since the understanding of mortality and the anticipation of death is highly connected to the social and cultural groups of the visitor.

Stone (2012) has introduced a model of mortality mediation to further explain the relationship between dark tourism and the contemplation of mortality. Socio-cultural factors and institutions related to religion, politics, media, and dark tourism shape one's mortality

experiences and moments. Stone suggests that in contemporary society ‘absent-present’ death paradox exists since while death and dying are omnipresent in contemporary media, popular culture, and dark tourism, the real death of self has been institutionalized so that it is absent and hidden from the public. Dark tourism revives absent death and brings it to the gaze of the public by turning private death into a communal commodity (Stone and Sharpley, 2008, p. 588) while utilizing social filtering in representations and interpretations of the death to answer tourism purposes (Stone, 2012, p. 1582). Dark tourism thus may provide ontological security and meaningfulness while helping to deal with the death-related fear (Stone, 2012, p. 1572). That is, in dark tourism experience the sentient, affective, knowing body reflects the experience through the individual’s qualities while, thus, potentially providing meaningfulness for example in forms of ontological security.

Stone (2012, pp. 1574–1575) states that even though dark tourism revives absent death, it also individualizes and fragments the meaning of death while representing death as distant and avoidable by only exposing unique deaths of individuals in unique settings. Normal deaths of normal people who do not offer uniqueness or Otherness do not hold value in consumption perspective. Either the life or the death of the deceased must be unique so that the revival of death would be meaningful. Throughout history, the information about dead and especially significant dead has been transmitted to others for example through literature, folklore, architecture, arts, music, religion, popular culture, media, and the internet. Storytelling, popular culture, and myth-making turn dead heroes and villains into immortal ancestors, whose image and deeds are remembered. Therefore, it is fair to argue that dark tourism can be thought to give a future for the dead while simultaneously ensuring giving past for the living (Stone, 2011, p. 27).

2.2 Emotion-laden death-related places

Dark tourism sites can be considered as places of mixed emotional experiences (Zheng et al., 2019, p. 105). In dark tourism places of death, disaster, and atrocity are visited (Foley & Lennon, 1996; see also Foley & Lennon, 1996b) and thus, for example, places such as murder and mass death sites, cemeteries, churchyards, homes of deceased cemeteries and battlefields can be considered as dark tourism sites (Kang, Scott, Lee, Ballantyne, 2012, p. 257). The memory of collective traumatic pasts is strongly embedded in the landscape and, therefore,

even intense emotional reactions may appear at dark tourism places (Zheng et al., 2019). Miles (2002, pp. 1176–1178) argues that different shades of dark tourism, which reflect the intensity of dark tourism, exist since not all the dark tourism sites are equally dark and directly related to suffering and death. For example, whereas Auschwitz-Birkenau is an actual death site and a rather extreme form of dark tourism, the US Holocaust Memorial Museum is a place associated with death. The range of different sites connected to death and suffering is constantly increasing in contemporary society (Stone, 2006, p. 146). Discussing different dark tourism sites in more detail is inexorably beyond the scope of this study. Therefore, this sub-chapter discusses dark tourism sites rather generally by following the view that dark tourism sites are emotionally laden places.

Seaton (2009, pp. 97–106) explains that dark tourism sites can be characterized as auratic places that embody communal mythology, significant deaths, and different versions of history that the community wishes to preserve. The charm of such places is in their ability to immerse the visitor in representations of death (Martini & Buda, 2020, p. 679). According to Sharpley and Stone (2009, p. 113), interpretation is the linkage between the dark site and the visitor. This includes the means through which places, buildings, history et cetera are bestowed meanings and then communicated to the visitor. Places are witnesses of history, but intermediation is the only way places can reflect the past (Åström, Korkiakangas & Olsson, 2004, p. 7).

Seaton (2009, p. 97) states that in the end, different stakeholders, however, perceive polysemic dark tourism sites differently and dark tourism sites elicit various responses. Places are subject to social meanings and, thus, narratives related to dark tourism sites can be accepted with respect, ignored, resisted, or denied. In their study regarding sought experiences at dark tourism sites, Biran et al. (2011, pp. 825–837) argue that whereas some visitors interpret the dark sites through an educational perspective, some visitors may seek emotional, spiritual and sentimental experiences. The study suggests that visitors perceiving dark tourism sites as their personal heritage are keener to desire emotional experiences and feeling connected to heritage. Others may desire educational experience more intensively. Visitors perceive the dark places through their bodies, affects, emotions, thoughts as well as cultural and spatial interactions (Martini & Buda, 2020, p. 684; see also Casey, 1996). Alongside providing a physical place where one can engage with the dead, dark tourism establishes a space where one can contemplate ontological aspects of mortality (Stone, 2012,

p. 1565). Martini and Buda (2020, pp. 680–684) explain that affect lingers in dark places in tremendous forms as well as intensities. The potential and aura of a place as well as individuals' affective responses to death influence how the space is related and interacted with. Dark tourism experiences occur when visitors encounter death and representations of death at dark tourism sites while sensitizing oneself for intense affective engagements.

Dark tourism sites are rather unique since while they might anger, offend, shock, and unsettle visitors, they potentially also provide wonder and excitement (Martini & Buda, 2020, p. 679). The negative emotional experiences are more complex in dark tourism compared to for example leisure tourism (Zheng et al., 2019, pp. 109–110). According to Nawijn, Isaac, van Lempt and Gridnevskiy (2016, p. 245), interpreting the negative emotional responses in dark tourism is not black-and-white since negative emotional responses are not necessarily interpreted as bad by the visitors. Combining positive and negative emotions may be a more fruitful way to understand how dark tourism sites are experienced as well as how emotional experience shapes the construction of meaning and behavior of the visitor. Buda, d'Hauteserre, and Johnston (2014, p. 112) rather similarly explain that emotions influence how people relate to others as well as places. Feelings are individual yet collective and imagined yet material. Feelings may as well stem from national, social, cultural, or religious history. In the field of dark tourism, understanding what is “dark” is socially constructed as well as personally defined (Biran & Poria, 2012, pp. 62–63).

The emotional cluster of dark tourism developed by Nawijn et al. (2016) illustrate rather aptly the role of mixed emotional experiences in dark tourism. Nawijn et al. have examined the emotional clusters of dark tourism through the concentration camp memorial site. In the study, thirteen emotions were selected as meaningful factors that were situated under clusters of misery, sympathy, and positivity. The cluster of misery included emotions of “afraid”, “fear”, “despair”, “shame” and “contempt” whereas the cluster of sympathy included emotions of “compassion”, “sadness”, “disgust” and “awe”. Lastly, the cluster of positivity included “gratitude”, “pride”, “hope” and “fascination”. The findings of the study provide hints of how emotions are related to the meaning-making and behavior of the visitor. For example, emotions under misery cluster may contribute to making sense of life whereas emotions under positivity and sympathy clusters can contribute to meaning-making.

Zheng et al. (2019) state that since dark tourism sites arouse extraordinary emotional experiences, the dark tourism sites also have the potential to turn into sacred and spiritual places. The auratic quality of space varies depending on the landscape and the aura of a space can be also negative or even unholy due to macabre past (Seaton, 2009, p. 85). According to Zheng et al. (2019), constructing place meaning is greatly dependent on how visitors experience, feel, imagine, and understand sites of death as well as how visitors transform negative feelings and seek meanings. In the study conducted by Zheng et al., the feeling of appreciation was found out to contribute to spiritual meaning directly. Intense feelings such as for example depression, sorrow, shock have indirect potential to enhance visitors' learning and awareness when one processes and transforms negative feelings and hence constructs spiritual meaning. The feeling of fear, on the other hand, did not prove to have an impact either on learning or spiritual meaning.

2.3 Cemetery tourism: Wandering in the “Other space”?

Even though cemetery tourism can first seem rather grim, it is more than death, grief-seeking, and dark tourism (see Leming and Dickinson, 2016; Pliberšek and Vrban, 2018). Leming and Dickinson (2016, pp. 436–443) argue that when a person visits a cemetery under less stressful conditions than funerals, the person can pay attention to gravestones, experience entertainment, and inspiration as well as learn about history, culture and architecture while feeling relaxed. Cultural heritage existing in cemeteries in a form of art, historical facts, and architecture provides the possibility to discover the essence of the local society present (Pliberšek and Vrban, p. 194). Furthermore, cemeteries work as a gateway to local history by providing a unique venue where historical memories are preserved and transmitted to future generations (Millán et al., 2019, p. 7). Cemeteries are usually connected with death and therefore negative emotions like sorrow and frustration emerge when cemeteries are discussed even though due to the various features of cemeteries, feelings such as enthusiasm and cultural consciousness may also appear (Pliberšek and Vrban, 2018, p. 196).

Pliberšek and Vrban (2018, p. 196) define a cemetery as a specific area where funeral rites are conducted, and the remains of the deceased are preserved. Harva (2018, p. 502) explains that in Finnish folk belief the cemeteries were considered as cities of the death, and therefore, they were meaningful meeting places for the living and the death as well as commemorating sites.

Later, the concept of cemeteries changed, and the cemeteries were no longer considered as places where the dead lived and wandered but they were considered as places where the dead could be reminisced instead (Lehikoinen, 2011, p. 91). The contemporary cemeteries are rather different from the burial sites in the past even though throughout history some sort of arrangements for the deceased have been followed (Miller & Rivera, 2006, p. 335). Through symbols and monuments, cemeteries portray culture from specific historical periods (Pliberšek & Vrban, 2018, p. 198). In this sense, cemeteries are also part of our intangible heritage and anthropology since cemeteries are the venues of the rituals and practices of death (Millán et al., 2019, p. 7).

Miller and Rivera (2006, pp. 334–335) state, that it is natural for humans to have an urge to seek the meaning behind death and reflect life in places where death is present. Whether the remains of the deceased are in the graves or either monuments or tombs that are used as a symbol of the final resting place, it is evident that the location has historical meaning for the local community and the place has symbolic meanings. In some cases where a place holds historical and religious value, the place contributes to the culture of the community or is a source of local myths, locals show affection towards the place and are rather sentimental towards it. According to Millán et al. (2019, p. 7), cemeteries are unique sacred and emotional spaces that also represent historical events and memories communities do not want to forget.

Dark tourism sites embody communal mythology and retain the historical narratives the community desires to preserve (Seaton, 2009, p. 97). In cemeteries information about the place as well as stories, deeds, past lives and history of people who once lived is present (Tanas, 2004, p. 73). Furthermore, cemeteries are places where several myths and legends originate from. According to Valk and Sävborg (2018, p. 19) myths create otherworldly realms whereas legends are partly linked to reality, real people, and real environment where the stories take place. In legends, otherworldly elements are utilized and brought into the daily environment, nonetheless. Legendary stories, therefore, have the potential to modify local familiar landscapes and provide supernatural aura to certain places, such as graveyards and churches.

There have been discussions of whether cemeteries can be considered as “Other spaces”. Foucault (1986) has described cemeteries as “Other spaces” through the concept of

heterotopia – placeless place that is a mythic joint experience existing alongside real places. Through this lens, cemeteries are out of ordinary spaces since they are multifaceted dynamic mythic and meaning-laden spaces that encompass both historical and contemporary dimensions (see Foucault, 1986). Young and Light (2016, p. 66), on the other hand, address the need to rethink whether cemeteries can be considered as alternative spaces. Multiple stakeholders with a wide range of requirements and intentions engage with cemeteries. Since cemeteries are linked to death, considering cemeteries as “Other space” is rather justified. However, everyday practices are increasingly pursued in contemporary cemeteries, and in this sense, considering cemeteries as “Other spaces” is questionable.

According to Grabalov (2018, pp. 77–78) urban cemeteries are used in a variety of ways and not only exclusively to commemoration functions. The observations conducted at three urban cemeteries in Malmö indicate that walking, cycling, walking dogs, and practicing sports are practiced at urban cemeteries. Multifunctional use of cemeteries requires, however, knowledge, regulating, respecting the primary function, and considering cultural differences of attitudes (Nordh & Evensen, 2018). In this sense, Young and Light (2016, p. 66) argue that instead of concentrating on “Other spaces” turning the focus towards dynamic, emerging, and relational nature of spaces might be more rational. Cemetery tourism is becoming more and more trendy these days and visitors roam at cemeteries while discovering artistic, historical, architectural, and scenic heritage as well as macabre stories (Millán et al., 2019, p. 5). Pliberšek and Vrban (2018, p. 194) argue that cemeteries could be an opportunity for rural areas that lack remarkable tourism attractions to establish long-lasting valid tourism products. One remarkable contributing factor for this is cemeteries' ability to offer opportunities to discover, create, and promote stories. Stories, on the other hand, attract visitors while offering interpretations of history, values of society, and culture.

Pliberšek and Vrban (2018) examined opportunities provided by small village cemeteries to promote and develop village tourism. In the study, interviews were conducted to discover stories that were utilized in a simple promotional tool. Story attractiveness and promotional tool effectiveness were, however, not within the limits of research resources. Nevertheless, the study pointed out that interesting as well as potential stories for tourism development exist even in small village cemeteries which lack remarkable tourism attractions.

3. Exploring place identity through proximate Otherness

Richards (2017, p. 8–16) states that even though tourism used to be a rather well-defined activity in the past, the rapid growth of tourism as well as a wide range of travel and tourism practices emerging urges to re-think for example the role of locals as tourists. The definition of proximity tourism is not commonly recognized since the traditional definition of tourism includes the aspect of distance and traveling outside of one's usual environment (Diaz-Soria, 2016, pp. 96–117). Richards (2017, p. 8–16) explains that even though the traditional definition of tourism implies that residents do not count as tourists, it is rather apparent that consuming places in a touristic way has become more common in a mundane environment. For instance, late tourism trends, such as dark tourism, have turned non-traditional tourism places into new tourism localities.

Social acceptance guides human beings and signs are indicating that a shift in mindsets, turning the focus towards proximity tourism, might be on its way. The trend of sustainable tourism might turn the table over and distance might become a disadvantage in the end (Jeuring & Haartsen, 2017, pp. 118–137, see also Dubois, Peeters, Ceron & Gössling, 2011; Jeuring & Diaz-Soria, 2017; Rantala et al., 2020). After all, it cannot be denied that tourism is a global phenomenon that is part of the Anthropocene and a rather problematic phenomenon considering the global sustainability (Gren & Huijbens, 2014, p. 4–14). Hibbert, Dickinson, Fössling & Curtin (2015, pp. 1111–1112), argue that identity can have a rather crucial role in tourism mobility since identities represent stories that define who we are. There is a possibility for providing novel narratives in tourism which support constructing personal stories and that do not completely rely on exotic and long-haul travel. For example, traveling sustainably can be connected to positive status by constructing a counter identity for highly mobile exoticism seekers.

External risks such as the fear of pandemics and terrorist attacks have raised an increased alarm of international tourists about personal safety during the past decade (Seabra, Dolnicar, Abrantes & Kastenholz, 2013, p. 502). Such, external risks affect international travel flows negatively and potentially change preferences (Coshall, 2003, p. 4). The COVID-19 pandemic is one example of major global threats that globally unexpectedly swayed common sense of safety and set abrupt travel restrictions. These kinds of external threats swaying the very basic

needs may contribute to altering mindsets and turn the focus more effectively towards proximity tourism. Thus, possibilities offered by proximity tourism are indeed worth examining in the unpredictably changing world. Geographical distance is not a necessity considering exoticism and realizing this is the key to attribute Otherness and to experience unfamiliarity in the proximate environment (Jeuring & Diaz-Soria, 2017, p. 4).

First, it is important to understand how people see their proximate environment as attractive for tourism and how proximity and distance correlate with each other (Jeuring & Haartsen, 2017, p. 123). Blom (2000, pp. 29–36) states that the urge to see something new or to “escape from reality” drives people to travel. Not only geographically new and unknown places attract visitors but also places (not inevitably geographically special) which provide a sense of mental proximity and feeling of belonging. According to Jeuring and Haartsen (2017, pp. 125–136) behavioral and perceptual barriers can, however, restrain to value Otherness and differences in proximity environment since mundane life tends to conceal these. Significance of familiarity should not be cast aside completely while seeking Otherness since familiarity and comfortability also play a big role in tourism behavior. Unattractiveness and attractiveness are subjective, relative, comparative, and linked to both place and time.

According to Jeuring and Haartsen (2017, pp. 118–137) proximity and distance are a double-edged sword that can affect tourist behavior and experiences in multiple ways. People seek Otherness and differences while traveling and these factors can motivate people to travel even long distances to run away from mundanity. However, people are different, and some seek routines and familiarity per se. A sense of shared culture and history potentially work even as pull factors for a destination (Huang, Chen & Lin, 2013, p. 183). Since some people travel far away to fulfill their needs whereas others stay relatively close to home while fulfilling their needs, it is appropriate to conclude that the attractiveness and unattractiveness of proximity and distance are subjective in the end (Jeuring and Haartsen, 2017, pp. 118–137).

Proximity tourism also has some rather exquisite benefits for the local community. According to Jeuring and Haartsen (2017, pp. 120–137), proximity tourism can be potentially a driver for the local economy, culture, and social networks. Therefore, residents should be targeted in regional tourism. Proximity tourism is also a convenient choice if limited resources and personal circumstances restrict mobility. Canavan (2012, p. 349) has studied domestic tourism in small-sized islands under the term “micro-domestic tourism” and through the case of the

Isle of Man. At best micro-domestic tourism provides accessible unspoiled landscapes, social interest and leisure opportunities, social cohesion, and civic pride as well as supports community infrastructure and industry. Furthermore, micro-domestic tourism in small islands and peripheral locations has the potential to tackle a lack of social opportunities and a lack of activities for locals. Achieving this, however, requires strategies, such as recognizing niche groups and providing information boards to facilitate touristic activities. Through acting as hosts, proving word of mouth, sharing knowledge, and enthusiasm the residents can support positive visit experiences for foreigners as well. Richards (2017, pp. 10–14) points out that individualized, distinctive, local, and authentic forms of tourism have been emphasized to a greater extent recently, and consequently, for example, co-creation of tourism between residents and tourists is valued increasingly.

This chapter reviewed why shifting mindsets and focusing on proximity tourism is timely and worth considering. Furthermore, the chapter stated that if a different mindset is adopted, Otherness and exoticism can be found even in one's proximate environment. The following sub-chapters discuss subjectivity of Otherness and place identity in more detail to further understand how Otherness and exoticism can be found in one's proximate environment and how meanings of places are understood.

3.1 Finding Otherness in the proximate environment

Often in tourism studies pursuing "the Other" is depicted as a socio-political one-way process where one culture attributes consciously or unconsciously imagined differences on members of another culture while subordinating (Seaton, 2009, p. 77). Indeed, pursuing differences and Otherness is often the trigger to travel even long-distances to escape from everyday life (Jeuring & Haartsen, 2017, p. 122). Due to the globalization of information, it is easier to gain information regarding remote places than about the places that are right next to us (Diaz-Soria & Llurdés Coit, 2013, p. 303). Richards (2017, p. 15) argues that since tourism and visiting other cultures have become a common commodity in the contemporary world, people start to transfer the practices of doing tourism in a proximate environment to find features that others have not yet found. Identifying Otherness in the proximate environment can stem from for example lack of spatial or historical knowledge (Diaz-Soria, 2016). Richards (2017, p. 9) argues that also the concept of "normal environmental" is itself worth scrutinizing while

discussing of proximity tourism. The modern urban life centralizes around certain places that are consumed on a regular basis and, therefore, other parts of the proximity surrounding may be as unknown and as exotic as faraway tourism destinations. Therefore, the proximate environment has the potential to arouse curiosity and urge to explore.

Seaton (2009, pp. 77–83) argues that pursuing the Other does not necessarily require physical escape but, on the other hand, a mental journey is a way to find Otherness as well. In this sense, adopting alternative ways of conceptualizing “the Other” opens new paths. Othering takes place when one’s identity confronts images, ideas, perceptions, representations, and manifestations that differ from one’s own while provoking negative and positive responses. Attributing difference can take place physically, socially, or ideologically. Thus, whatever physically or mentally clashes with mundane life can be considered “the Other”. No matter attractive or repulsive. Adopting a broader definition of Otherness enables recognizing that psychological development, self-recognitions, and enactment of individual identity may be potential part of pursuing the Other. Diaz-Soria (2016) has studied the subjective construction of the Otherness and argues that adopting a different mindset is the key to finding Otherness in one’s proximate environment. That is a means of distancing oneself from the proximate environment to see it in a different light.

Dark tourism might be one mean to find Otherness in a proximate environment. Seaton (2009, pp. 83–84) argues that the Otherness of death is the greatest of all Others since death is universal and remains unknown eternally. The most configurations of Otherness are only temporary since Otherness tends to erode once contact increases and the Other becomes eventually familiar. The Other of death, however, cannot become familiar for the living and it eternally remains as a fascinating yet repelling mystery. Death is in a central role in dark tourism and at best the essence of dark tourism site endorses auratic power which also casts extreme Otherness.

Carter (2019, p. 201) explains that auras are afterlife features of objects that enable access to Other spaces and times outside of the object’s present being. Auras wield power to move and touch the sentient subject’s body. Seaton (2009, pp. 85–88) states that aura of sacred space itself separates it from the mundane world. Sacred space, such as a cathedral or a churchyard, often also has physical features, such as location, presentation, architecture, and design, that set it apart with mundane. In dark tourism sites the auratic power is not necessarily sacred

though. Macabre events may arouse also powerful negative and unholy aura. Aura is not, however, self-evident and at worst commodification and managing a dark tourism site inappropriately related to its essence, distracts or shatters the aura of the place while eroding Otherness. Typical tourism management strategies, such as making the place easy to access or offering commodities, erodes the Otherness by bringing mundane elements to space where Otherness is pursued. For dark tourism sites, anti-management may be a good way to preserve the aura and the Otherness of the place in the end. For example, retaining the untamed appearance of the historical cemetery can be a form of auratic preservation since the aura of cemeteries is not only about death but also about the physical features.

3.2 Proximity tourism and place identity

Hague (2004, p. 7) explains that places have their own identity. Place identities contain social environments of feelings, meanings, experiences, memories, and actions. Thus, place identities are relational, subjective yet collective, and fostered through socialization yet filtered by social structures. That is to say, the place identity shapes when “the spirit of the venue” interacts with the people who engaging with the place (Pica, 2017, p. 67). The context in which people live in and relate to each other regulates place identity (Toussaint & Decrop, 2013, p. 14) and, therefore, places appear for example differently to locals than to outsiders due to collective memory (Valk & Sävborg, 2018, p. 9). Similarly, Diaz-Soria (2016) has pointed out that the approach of a proximity tourist is more complex compared to traditional tourists since proximity tourists already have a relationship with the destination, and the information gained is automatically put into the context. Furthermore, memories work as a filter for individuals and, therefore, the proximity experience and destination image may be affected by memories. That is, places mean different things to different people as well as social groups, and meanings of places are constantly re-defined and negotiated (Gustafson, 2006, p. 31). For example, while a visit to a cemetery can provide a sense of peace, tranquility, and space to reminisce valuable memories, the cemetery can in turn also arouse feelings of loss, regret, mystery or fear in a different context (Valk & Sävborg, 2018, p. 11). Thus, the place identity of a designated cemetery can be multilayered since the experience forms around diverse variables.

Korkiakangas (2004, p. 150) explains that places have their physical form which ultimately defines their very essence and behavior patterns related to the place or space. Already through this, the construction of meanings takes place. Some conceptions and images can be partly shared with others, but in the end the sense of place varies between individuals. For example, solemnity, remembrance, and respect are attributes generally connected to a cemetery, and anyone disregarding these is most certainly despised by the community (Tanas, 2004, p. 75). Therefore, while social acceptance defines the very essence of the cemetery and sets certain patterns of behavior, in the end the sense of place is subjective and subject to several variables. Since places are not only physical, continuous discovering of places, and re-inventing new ways to understand places, such as developing a literal sense, set the perception of place in a new light (Casey 1996).

According to Åström et al. (2014, p. 7) individual interpretation is a meaningful part of the urban environment since the urban environment is a complex structure that reflects both past and presents momentous experiences. In the urban environment, which here refers to the built environment, elements of nature also have a significant role. Collective history lingers in the urban environment and reflects history through intermediation and time for those locals who know and recognize what the building tells. Therefore, the urban environment is not only what we are currently experiencing but also the memories of the past are involved in the meaning-making process. According to Jeuring and Haartsen (2017, pp. 120–137) when familiar places are introduced to the locals in a new light, locals can reconstruct identities of the place they are living in as well as their own identity. Furthermore, regional pride and awareness can enhance due to proximity tourism. Korkiakangas (2004, pp. 158–159) states that the built environment comprises multiple various levels and times. While people are keen to preserve for example buildings that are meaningful due to their past, the need to modify the building to serve multiple purposes and changing environments exist. Thus, mental recollections enable using places as they are in the present while appreciating past as a resource.

For example, cemeteries possess potential in this sense. Cemeteries are remembrance sites and the final resting place of the dead which are charged with historical and cultural value (Tanas, 2004, p. 73) but cemeteries are also multifunctional places where other activities such as practicing sports and tourism take place (see Grabalov, 2018; Nordh & Evensen, 2018). Cemeteries encompass complex identity and reflect various levels and times. Cemeteries

change and develop through time and for example, symbols, architecture, epitaphs et cetera have transformed when the time has passed by as well as perceptions of death have changed (Tanas, 2004, pp. 73–79). While gravestones, memorials, and monuments are texts about the past, not everyone derives the same meaning from them (Seaton, 2009, p. 97). The tombstones and memorials speak only to those who know the story behind. Thus, the meaningfulness of gravestones, memorials, and monuments is in the eyes of the interpreter (Seaton, 2009, p. 97).

Valk and Sävborg (2018, pp. 7–18) explain that places are far beyond being only physical locations – places can be meaningful in diverse different ways. Places are settings in which memories and exceptional story worlds can be encountered. Nevertheless, places are not only settings where stories take place, but they are also sensed and intimate realities that activate through storytelling. The story world, place, and people may create a realm together. Imagination wields power to arouse supernatural aura that sheds mysterious Otherness to the mundane world. According to Seaton (2009, p. 96), perceptions of space are not, however, commonly shared since space is constructed as much through imagination as it is through physical experiencing. Furthermore, space is socially constructed and, therefore, other individuals, groups, and cultures influence the meaning of space. Moreover, spaces are only temporal and perceived meanings may change over time. Finally, space is attributed and has no meaning in general. In the end, people give meaning to spaces and, therefore, the meaning of space as well as place is in the end subjective. Places are polysemic. No matter how much a place means for one social group, it can be completely meaningless to others. Therefore, whereas some people consider for example cemeteries as “Other spaces” (see Foucault, 1986) where death can be encountered through representations of death, others might consider cemeteries as a part of a wider urban green space with recreational facilities (see Nordh & Evensen, 2018; Swensen, 2018).

4. Examining dark proximity tourism through autoethnography

According to Ellis and Bochner (2000, pp. 739–740) the research process (graphy), culture (ethno), and self (auto) are the three components of autoethnography. Boundaries of these three components are, however, rather blurry and there is no commonly agreed strict definition of different types of autoethnography. Nevertheless, autoethnography seeks to illustrate cultural experience through personal experience (Adams et al., 2015, p. 276). Jones et al. (2013, pp. 22) explain that autoethnography has four typical characteristics that distinguish it from other personal works. First, autoethnography takes culture and cultural practices under scrutiny and discusses them even critically when necessary. Second, autoethnography seeks to contribute to already existing research. Third, vulnerability is emphasized and aspired. Fourth, autoethnography seeks response from readers and, therefore, seeks to create a reciprocal relationship with the audience. Thus, an autoethnographic study can be a meticulous, theoretical, analytical yet emotional laden study that comprehensively discusses both personal experiences and broader social phenomenon (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011, p. 283). Anderson (2006, pp. 386–387) explains that evocative autoethnography style is devoted to the subjective emotional experience of the researcher whereas analytic autoethnography style strives even beyond this subjective experience, even though the personal experience is acknowledged as an important basis for the research. That is, social science research typically seeks to understand phenomena under scrutiny as a broader social phenomenon instead of purely relying on empirical data findings.

This study turns a bit more towards analytic autoethnography due to its aims, although the strengths of evocative autoethnography are not disregarded whatsoever. Evocative autoethnography is highly cherished in illustrating nuanced insights and dark proximity tourism experience, yet the study strives for understanding the wider social and cultural phenomenon of dark proximity tourism through the worldview of the researcher. The main outlines adopted in this study are rather well comprised in the definition of autoethnography suggested by Reed-Danahay (1997, p. 9), according to which autoethnography presents self-narratives which are examined within a specific social context. This study strives to understand the social and cultural phenomenon of dark proximity tourism by analyzing and interpreting the empirical data through already existing literature and theories.

4.1 Empirical data and the framework for analysis

The study utilized fieldnotes as empirical data. The field notes reflectively described and discussed the process of pursuing Otherness through death-related myths and legends as well as the dark proximity tourism experiences I underwent while visiting the field. The field notes regarding the process of pursuing Otherness were recorded directly into electronic documents since discovering death-related myths and legends was a process that kept me glued to the computer and books. The field notes covered the thoughts, emotions, and challenges encountered while seeking Otherness as well as the post-thoughts regarding the process (total 6 pages). After discovering death-related stories, the Old Church Island Cemetery was visited twice and during these visits, field notes highlighting activities, behavior, thoughts, and emotional responses were written in a notebook. The handwritten raw field notes were re-written into thick descriptions on the computer right after the visit to the field to ensure the readability of the data (total 8 pages). Furthermore, during the visits to the Old Church Island Cemetery pictures were taken (96 pcs). The pictures were used to illustrate the lived experience in the analysis and discussion chapter. Otherwise, the pictures were neither analyzed in the study nor utilized to support memory. Aesthetic and evocative thick descriptions are typical for autoethnography (Adams et al., 2015, p. 277), and precisely these were the very core of empirical data utilized in this study. Thick descriptions written during the process of seeking Otherness and lived experiences were, thereafter, comprised and presented as autoethnographic narratives in the analysis and discussion section of the study. Autoethnographic texts reflect actions, dialogues, emotions, embodiment, spirituality, self-consciousness, moral and ethical choices, meanings, and self-reflexivity of the researcher within a specific context (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, pp. 739–744).

The reason for utilizing field notes to track the process of seeking Otherness was to help me to track my understanding and sense-making process in different phases of the research. Autoethnography relies on sense-making and, at its best, provides insight on how experiences under scrutiny are important, challenging, or transformative (Adams et al., 2015, p. 27). The process of pursuing Otherness that took place before the lived experiences was an intrinsic part of the holistic dark proximity tourism experience considering that I endeavored to practice dark tourism in accordance to my interests and preferences in a place where no tourism infrastructure exists. The charm of dark tourism places is in their ability to immerse

the visitor in representations of death (Martini & Buda, 2020, p. 679) and the interpretation is the linkage between dark tourism site and the visitor (Sharpley & Stone, 2009, p. 113). It is important to acknowledge that I was the one in charge of creating the representations of death and, thus, attention had to be paid to emotions and thoughts that emerged before the lived experiences since interpretation started to take place already while I was discovering the death-related stories. Therefore, keeping track of the experience as well as emotions and thoughts during the process of pursuing Otherness evoked was vital.

The hermeneutic phenomenology paradigm that the study follows encourages usage of reflective field notes in the interpretation process as well as acknowledges that pre-understanding, assumptions, and biases of the researcher are fixed as well as an essential part of interpretation (Lavery, 2013, p. 28). In this sense, it is rather essential to recognize the relationship between me and the research field. I lived over twenty years in Viitasaari before moving elsewhere for studying. The relation to Viitasaari has, however, always remained strong. Viitasaari has always been like a safe haven where I have been able to return to between my adventures. Furthermore, I lived in Viitasaari during the thesis process and considered myself a member of the local community. Nonetheless, before the thesis process I had not visited the Old Church Island Cemetery. I knew about the place but for some reason, I had not felt the urge to visit the place earlier. Now the reader must be wondering that why did not I feel the urge to visit the Old Church Island Cemetery earlier since I claim to be a cemetery enthusiast? That is, it took years and years for me to adopt the role of a cemetery enthusiast as well as it took years and years for me to become interested in Finnish folklore. It is not always easy to look right next to oneself instead of traveling long distances. Before I was able to realize that there are still places that meet my fields of interest around my hometown area that are waiting to be discovered, I needed to adopt a different mindset. My interests in cemeteries and Finnish folklore provided a fruitful ground for adopting a new mindset.

In autoethnography, the patterns of cultural experiences derived from the empirical data are illustrated through different methods of storytelling (Adams et al., 2015, p. 277), which in this study means sharing illustrative autoethnographic accounts of the process of pursuing Otherness and lived dark proximity tourism experiences. Hereby, the reader is lead into my world and insights through the illustrative accounts which seek to explain dark proximity tourism as a social and cultural phenomenon from the insider perspective. Insider knowledge

has the potential to change assumptions of cultural phenomena and reveal insights that would otherwise be left unnoticed (Adams et al., 2015, p. 31). That is, in a thematic manner the experiential structures and parts of narratives describing the phenomenon in the fundamental and revealing manner (Van Manen, 1990, p. 93), were derived from the empirical data and taken under scrutiny. Furthermore, specifically parts of narratives where senses, emotions, feelings, embodiment, as well as expressions referring to one's meaning-making process, were taken under scrutiny (see Schorch, 2014).

Autoethnography in social sciences has been perceived controversial if traditional analysis or linkages to literature are not included (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 279), and thus connections to literature and theoretical frameworks were utilized to support the analysis and discussion part. The analysis and discussion part reflexively discuss de-constructed theoretical concepts alongside with the insightful autoethnographic accounts. Autoethnography as a methodology and hermeneutic phenomenology as a research paradigm guides the analysis framework of the study so that finding consensus between the interpretations and literature becomes an essential element. To accomplish a consensus between lived experiences, interpretations, and theories in a systematic way, the hermeneutic circle of understanding was engaged with to reinforce the interpretative process (Figure 2). That is, as Koch (1995, p. 835 as cited in Laverty, 2013, p. 30) has stated, understanding takes place when pre-understanding, the interpretative framework, and information sources interact with each other through the fusion of horizons.



Figure 2. Illustration of the hermeneutic circle the study adopts (Linnakoski, 2020).

4.2 Research ethics

The ethical principles of research published by the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity are followed in this study (see Finnish National Board on Research Integrity, 2019). This chapter discusses in more detail how the ethical principles related to protecting privacy and dignity, avoiding potential harm, pursuing benevolence and fidelity as well as protecting personal data are adhered to in this study. The above-mentioned ethical principles are particularly fundamental in this study for autoethnography is the methodology and the nature of the topic can be considered rather sensitive. Utilizing personal stories in research invariably contains personal, relational, and ethical risks (Adams et al., 2015, pp. 5–6).

According to Adams et al., (2015, pp. 95–134), commitment to creating trustworthy, probable, and resonant stories that intertwine with the theory is centric in autoethnography. In autoethnographic texts identities, experiences, and stories exist in relation to others and, therefore, the role of relational ethics becomes fundamental. The author must be respectful of the experience while simultaneously respecting the relationships depicted. Depicting experiences, recollections, and interpretations poses the danger of harming and exposing others. Fundamental, therefore, is to avoid disclosing information about persons, events, or sites that might cause harm. Research should always consider potential impacts on the ones involved (Elliott, 2005, p. 134). Protecting privacy and identities thus needs to be acknowledged throughout the study.

Protecting the safety and privacy of others may require modifying details such as circumstances, characteristics of persons, and places (Ellis et al., 2011, pp. 281–282). In this study the stance towards protecting safety and privacy was rigorous and information that might have exposed the identities of others was not disclosed under any circumstances. Viitasaari is a relationally small city where personal networks are easily recognizable and, thus, special vigilance and rigorous stance towards privacy, identity, and safety issues were adopted. Pictures of the gravestones, where the names of the deceased were readable were, thus, not utilized in the study for ethical reasons. Considering that the main emphasis of the study was on my own lived experiences, disclosing specific information related to others was perceived neither necessary nor advisable. Nonetheless, relational ethics inevitably steps into the picture when lived experiences are reflected holistically and within certain contexts. One

of the narratives includes my friend who visited the Old Church Island Cemetery together with me. Even though the field notes that were taken or evocative accounts shared in the study did not concentrate on my friend, I obtained permission from my friend to share the accounts since my friend can be identified from the story by the local people who know me and my relations well. Even though I obtained permission from my friend, attention was still paid to not to reveal information regarding my friend that was not perceived essential for the sake of the research.

In autoethnography subjectivity, emotionality, and researcher's influence are recognized (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 274). Through displaying personal experiences in research, autoethnography provides an alternative and nuanced way to study cultural experience (Jones et al., 2013, p.33). Lazarus (1991, pp. 351–352) explains that social reality is subjective, unique and it cannot be shared with others in its entirety. Meanings, thoughts, feelings, wishes, and acts are a personal and social reality, in the end, is constructed in one's mind. Social environment, however, shapes thoughts, emotions, and actions over the life course. Thus, while this study offers an alternative and nuanced way to understand subjective dark proximity tourism experience and my worldview through autoethnography whilst highlighting the role of justification, truthfulness, analytics, sense-making, and credibility, it is important to highlight that I do not claim that interpretations are truths themselves per se. Acknowledging that the hermeneutic phenomenology paradigm guides the study and that the study seeks to depict the phenomenon and world through my lenses is crucial. I subscribe to the statement of philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1888/1988, p. 458) according to which “against that positivism which stops before phenomena, saying “there are only facts,” I should say: no, it is precisely facts that do not exist, only interpretations”.

The death-related stories discovered during the process of pursuing Otherness were gathered together as “representations of death” according to my fields of interest. The representations of death are presented in the analysis and discussion part of the study and they utilized newspaper articles obtained from the collection of the National Library of Finland (total 9 pcs), books (total 4 pcs), and academic dissertations (total 3 pcs). The sources were considered as public information, thus, eligible to utilize. I made a conscious decision to only utilize relatively old death-related stories in a respectable manner. Utilizing present and everyday death for dark tourism purposes is not socially accepted and appropriate (Biran & Poria, 2012, p. 63) whereas events in distant past are not as poignant as events in the

immediate past (Craig & Thompson, 2012, p. 183). Utilizing older stories also fitted into my fields of interest. Developing, promoting, or offering dark sites and attraction for tourism consumption can cause ethical debates (Sharpley, 2009, p.8), and transmitting narratives related to death include moral dilemmas (Stone, 2016). Dark tourism in living communities is problematic since some communities might not want to utilize the potential of dark tourism wilds but rather prefer that narratives fade into oblivion (Hooper, 2017). Miles (2002, p. 1176) has argued that the challenges of dark tourism are to successfully bring a memorial thing alive while creating empathy between the visitor and the past victim. Even though this study did not seek to commercialize the cemetery under scrutiny but rather sought to provide desired representations of death for me to utilize during lived dark proximity tourism experiences, the need to respect the local community, places, victims, and history while gathering the material into representations of death was indispensable.

Adams et al. (2015, pp. 62–64) explain that protecting oneself is also a significant ethical issue the autoethnography needs to adhere to considering the goals and consequences of the study. Personal risks that can affect intimate or professional relationships when identities, experiences, relationships, and communities of the researcher are discussed. Furthermore, an autoethnographic study can sometimes trigger unsettled thoughts, feelings, and behaviors when the researcher recollects distressing experiences. Unexpected distress may appear even on research topics that are not considered sensitive (Elliott, 2015, p. 136).

Death is an ambiguous topic (Pajari, Jalonon, Miettinen & Kanerva, 2019, p.7). The sensitive nature of the topic and the need to protect myself were acknowledged in this autoethnographic study and, therefore, I took the right to leave out or generalize some sensitive and intimate issues from the published study. Intimate, confidential, and sensitive issues were, however, dealt with reflectively in the field notes which the study utilized as empirical data. Thus, the field notes were considered as private data which were subject to protecting and handling properly. The empirical data was exclusively used for this autoethnographic study and the electronic data was stored on the private domain according to the ethical principles of research published by the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (see Finnish National Board on Research Integrity, 2009).

5. Encountering the Other: Analysis and discussion

Emotions, lived experience, the concept of place, as well as the concept of Otherness, have a pivotal role in this chapter since the concepts establish a linkage between dark tourism and proximity tourism, thus, setting a common framework for the analysis and discussion part of the study where the dark proximity tourism experience is under scrutiny.

The first sub-chapter discusses and explains how Otherness was pursued in my proximate environment and what was the process like. Theories related to proximity tourism, dark tourism, and cemetery tourism are utilized to discuss the process of pursuing Otherness analytically. Moreover, the sub-chapter introduces death-related stories connected to the Old Church Island Cemetery discovered during the process. These stories were gathered together from different sources and should be viewed as “representations of death” that formed the ultimate linkage between me and the dark tourism site.

The second sub-chapter guides the reader through the lived dark proximity tourism experiences by presenting autoethnographic accounts and by providing illustrative pictures of the Old Church Island Cemetery. Two rather different kinds of lived experiences that took place in the Old Church Island Cemetery are presented as well as discussed analytically in the light of hermeneutic phenomenology. The death-related stories discovered in the first sub-chapter were the baseline for the lived dark proximity tourism experiences.

The third sub-chapter discusses the emotions and feelings that took place during the stages of pre-experience, on-site experience, and post-experience in more detail. Furthermore, the relation of the stages with each other, as well as the context the emotions took place, are discussed. Moreover, the sub-chapter seeks to understand in a hermeneutic phenomenological manner how the place identity of the Old Church Island Cemetery shaped throughout the whole process.

5.1 Pre-experience: The pursuit of Otherness

I remember keenly the walking tour I took in Edinburgh during which macabre stories from the past were told. The memories of the stories have not faded away even though it has been almost five years now. Witchcraft, executions, mass burials, drowning witches, and a bunch of other macabre death-related stories. I remember I felt inspired and excited after hearing the stories. I felt very much alive. I felt the mystic atmosphere that had fallen all over the city.

It never came to my mind, that I could find death-related myths and legends in my proximate surroundings as well. After all, I had lived in Viitasaari for a considerably long time without running into any. Then, while deciding what I would like to study in my thesis, I found a statement of Harva (2018, pp.501–502) according to which the names of the church-occupants have mostly faded into oblivion over time but for example in Viitasaari, narratives of a church-occupant with the name Liisa Iiro have been recorded.

Thus, inspired by the notion of the church-occupant of Viitasaari, I began the process of pursuing Otherness in my proximate environment by convincing myself that there must be interesting stories related to the Old Church Island Cemetery. If stories linger in other cemeteries in tremendous quantities, why would the cemeteries in my immediate environment be storyless? Death-related historical myths and legends were specifically what I was looking for. I adore these kinds of stories that intertwine the present and the past while creating mysticism. This kind of stories are influential. They evoke feelings in me, they bound me to places and people (usually to dead people) while offering a pathway to a realm where I can unleash my imagination.

I was struggling at first. Finding death-related myths and legends related to the Old Church Island Cemetery did not seem easy even though as a folklore enthusiast I was a bit familiar with death-related Finnish belief traditions and thus the context was somehow familiar. At some point, through gaining more knowledge and learning how to look for information, the process became gradually easier and easier. And that was also when the frustration hit me. Suddenly I started to find a lot of interesting macabre stories and folk beliefs around my proximate area that made me look at the places differently and with a new kind of respect. It was frustrating and even embarrassing to realize that the otherworldly realm that I had

acquainted myself with reading fictional historical novels and through consuming tourism products elsewhere, had been also lingering in my proximate surrounding all along. Of course, I was also excited since clearly, the stories I was digging up were extraordinary, and not some kind of general information one can just find out quickly from the internet. I must admit that some of the stories were a bit distracting and disgusting in their own way especially since my proximate environment was the “theatre” of happenings. That is also what made the stories more fascinating though. As a folklore enthusiast, it was extremely fascinating to realize that such happenings had taken place at my home turf.

The stories greatly affected my enthusiasm to visit the Old Church Island Cemetery. It felt like I was the one entitled to know and understand the secrets of the Old Church Island through my effort. I rarely have such a strong feeling of anticipation towards sites I am planning to casually visit abroad. Through discovering stories and the fascinating past of the Old Church Island Cemetery, my perception of the place seemed to change, and my expectations grew. Suddenly, visiting the Old Church Island Cemetery made more sense than ever. Indeed, some people might find it weird to feel the urge to visit a place where something once existed but no longer exists. For me, entering the realm where my imagination can freely wander and where mysterious past can be engaged with, seems important in dark tourism. The fact that something is mysterious, macabre, and can be only partly unveiled and encountered, is fascinating.

Right at the beginning, it is crucial to acknowledge that the process of pursuing Otherness was entered through my roles as a long-term member of the local community, cemetery enthusiast, folklore enthusiast as well as researcher. Thus, I had specific fields of interest and pre-understandings, that guided me throughout the process of pursuing Otherness. There have been studies indicating that fascination with death might not be an important reason for visiting places associated with death (see Biran et al., 2011), but in my case, it is rather adequate to state that the fascination with death played an important role considering both motivational and experiential aspects. However, aspects such as connecting with one's personal heritage and desire for emotional experience had an important role as well (see Biran et al., 2011). Educational aspects played high importance due to the role of a researcher but considering my personality and typical ways of practicing tourism emotional experiences played a more crucial role.

I had formerly participated in a rather memorable city tour in Edinburgh, where death-related legends and myths were widely utilized. We wandered around the city by walking in a small group and it was surprising how some places I had formerly walked past by suddenly turned alive through the stories of the guide. Mysticism started to ooze from even unexpected places. This memory and the feelings the tour had evoked inspired me to pursue Otherness at the Old Church Island Cemetery specifically through local myths and legends. Pursuing Otherness could have been done in many ways, but my personal fields of interest played a big role in the process. Since I was researching dark proximity tourism, the baseline for the empirical part was to adopt a different mindset that could open a pathway for a mental escape from mundane life (see Diaz-Soria, 2016; Seaton, 2009, pp. 77–83) through traumatic deaths, murders, execution methods, disasters, and causes of death that are in general representative in dark tourism (Stone, 2012, pp. 1578–1581). Thus, the I made a conscious decision to pursue Otherness through mortality moments that are no longer part of mundane life (see Stone, 2012) to enhance the Otherness perceived.

My role as a long-term member of the local community is similarly worth acknowledging since the role also affected the way I pursued Otherness in my proximate environment. Narratives directed for locals go deeper in the stories since the basic historical facts are already known (Diaz-Soria, 2016), and therefore I concentrated on discovering myths and legends that wielded potential to support my dark proximity tourism experience by triggering interest and sense of mentally engaging something beyond the mundane. Legends that have otherworldly elements are linked to the reality, real people and real environment and, thus, the legends wield potential to charge local familiar real places, such as cemeteries, with supernatural aura (Valk & Sävborg, 2018, p. 19).

The facts that the Old Church Island Cemetery has no tourist infrastructure, tourism products, and that the information related to the Old Church Island Cemetery was very fragmented, caused me to enhance my knowledge of the site through death-related stories already before the first visit. Places can be indeed visited without any intention to engage with “storied places” but for me, stories have always been important in tourism practices. Through attributing difference ideologically with the help of death-related stories that were in the line of my identity and needs, I was able to honestly state that the I considered the Old Church Island Cemetery as beyond the mundane place in ideological sense (see Seaton, 2009, pp. 77–

83) already before the lived experiences.

Pursuing Otherness and seeking death-related stories connected to the Old Church Island Cemetery was not an effortless, simple or emotionless journey. My autoethnographic account above depicts how gaining knowledge of one's proximate surroundings can be itself engaging and affect greatly to the perceived place identity even before the place itself is engaged with. The power of pre-understanding, knowledge, memories, and thoughts the sentient subjects carry along with them to lived experiences (see Casey, 1996) should not be underestimated. Narratives can empower places and turn them into extraordinary locations (Valk & Sävborg, 2018, pp. 8–10). In my case, the issue requires special attention since my roles as a cemetery enthusiast as well as folklore enthusiast inevitably regulate the level of pre-understanding as well as the way how the place identity shaped once I discovered myths and legends related to the Old Church Island Cemetery. The place turned from a place that just previously existed into an “extraordinary mythic-laden place” that wielded ability to reflect the local history (see Åström et al., 2014).

Next the thesis presents the death-related stories discovered during the process of pursuing Otherness that were gathered together as “representations of death” according to my fields of interest. These representations of death form the ultimate linkage between me and the dark tourism site and, therefore, acknowledging these death-related stories in the study is inevitable. Alongside the stories, the process of pursuing Otherness is discussed analytically.

The Church-occupant and church-folk of the Old Church Island Cemetery

Lehikoinen (2011, p. 11) states that according to Finnish belief tradition, the soul of deceased person did not depart to afterlife immediately but the journey to the afterlife was instead a rather gradual process. Once person died the soul had to leave the body, but it still usually remained near the body. Soul of the deceased was believed to wander between afterlife and living. In some cases, the soul was sinister and dangerous. There are recorded folktales where the deceased person has returned to look for companion for the afterlife, fetch recently deceased or to punish wrongdoers (see Koski, 2011; Simonsuuri, 2017).

According to Koski (2011, pp. 344-348) in the Finnish belief tradition death related beings, church-folk (kirkonväki), appears in graveyards, on the roads or even in the houses to fetch

recently died souls. Church-folk also appeared in folktales when societal norms were broken by for example insulting death or breaking the boundary between the death and living or breaching norms against the death while causing disorder. Church-folk can be, therefore, seen as sustainers of societal order. In the Finnish folk tradition church-folk has also been utilized for malevolent and benign enchantment aspirations. Church-folk, however, is dangerous and problematic to control and only powerful seers were able to harness the dangerous power of church-folk. Often in folktales church-folk has been described as human like figures, decomposing bodies, invisible crowd or reek of death. Lehtikoinen (2011, pp. 262–263) describes church-folk as a community of death who are human like yet being buried has left marks in their bodies. Members of church-folk were once buried under the church floor or at the church yard and they appeared wearing the same outfits the dead had when they were buried.

Lehtikoinen (2011, pp. 262–266) describes that one had to be careful at the presence of the church-folk and behave well at the surroundings of a graveyard. When someone was about to die, the roads were crowded with church-folk heading towards the house of the person soon to die. Church-folk returned to the graveyard together with the body of the deceased and sometimes this caused problems. Church-folk weighted a lot and sometimes the horse could not pull the sledge (see Figure 3). In these situations, the carter needed to shout, “off of my sledge everyone, excess folk off of my sledge!”. After the request the horse was able to pull the sledge again.



Figure 3. Church-folk on the way back to the churchyard (Linnakoski, 2020).

The believes that churches have church-folk, as well as their mystical church-occupants were widely acknowledged throughout Finland (Kotiseutu: Suomen kotiseutututkimuksen äänenkannattaja, 1912, p. 11). According to Harva (2018, pp. 501–502), in Finnish belief tradition the first person buried in the churchyard turned into a church-occupant. The church-occupant was a frightening figure who possessed the ability to command the church-folk. An article in Oulun Lehti (1887) describes the church-occupant as a tall ferocious looking being which reaches the church ceiling and sometimes it had to even bent over to fit in. Hyötyniemi (1929, pp. 57–64) explains that powerful seers visited the church-occupants during the nighttime to ask for advices. The church-occupants gave advices on theft cases and on cases where a cure for a disease was needed.

The information related to the church-folk and the church-occupant above is general and not directly related to the Old Church Island Cemetery. The reason why I decided to include the information to my representation of death is that for me as a folklore enthusiast as well as a cemetery enthusiast the context matters, and these details and Finnish folk belief tradition regarding to death were tremendously fascinating. The context of the representations of death opened a path to a mysterious past where Finnish belief tradition guided the lives and behavior patterns of people. Lampela (2006, p. 179) suggests that in the contemporary world where tremendous amounts of stimulus exist, imaginary travel to old folk tales can offer voluminous experience. For example, old ghost stories can provide valuable information about the life in the past as well as show us that despite some details, the sources of fear have remained the same.

The context was, thus, the main setting through which I created the passageway to “the otherworldly realm” and linkage to the past. The context was also what my later discoveries regarding the Old Church Island Cemetery heavily relied upon. The field notes regarding to the pursuit of Otherness indicate that along the way when my knowledge and skills to understand the context grew, I was consequently able to find more detailed information regarding the Old Church Island Cemetery. Slowly, I started to learn how to search, interpret and understand the old newspaper articles that proved themselves exceedingly valuable regarding to my endeavor. The context and the articles created the otherworldly realm together. Only together. The context was what created understanding between the death-related stories, the Old Church Island Cemetery, me and the past. Understanding places in new ways for example through literal sense regulates the perception of a place (Casey, 1996).

Next, the story of church-folk and the church-occupants continues but this time the Old Church Island Cemetery is the theatre of the happenings.

Harva (2018, pp. 501–502) states that over time, several names of the church-occupants have faded into oblivion. However, for example in Viitasaari, narratives of a church-occupant with the name Liisa Iiro have been recorded. An article in Kotiseutu: Suomen kotiseutututkimuksen äänenkannattaja (1912, pp. 11–12) mentions that the church located in the Old Church Island Cemetery had a church-occupant called Liisa Iiro whom seers visited whenever aid from church-folk was needed. In the old times, Viitasaari was a well-known parish for its seers. People even traveled from afar to seek aid from the seers especially if the sickness was caused by a malevolent human being. The seer took the visitors to the church located on the island during the nighttime. Once the door of the church was reached the seer blew three times through the keyhole and shouted after each time “Liisa Iiro, open the door!”. After the third time, the door opened. The church had to be entered through jumping over the threshold while keeping both legs together since the door soon after slammed shut. Bloody remains and burned bible and gown of a priest found at the altar of the church were indicators of nighttime rituals of the seers.

Kyläkirjaston kuvalehti (1889, pp. 19–21) introduces a tale where the mysticism of how the seers were able to enter the church was unveiled. An eventful nighttime adventure explains how a person determined to unveil the mystery followed the seer and the person seeking a cure to the Old Church Island Cemetery. At the cemetery, the seer was practicing grave robbery with his accomplices at a grave where an old man was buried the previous day. Due to the disturbance of the person determined to unveil the mystery the evildoers believed that the church-folk had attacked them. In the end and after some other incidences, it was revealed that the gravedigger was the accomplice of the seer. That explained the power through which the seers were able to open the church door by blowing air to the keyhole. The gravedigger had left the door unlocked when agreed. In the end, the evildoers were punished, and ever since, bloody remains and other indicators of nighttime rituals of the seers did not appear to the altar of the church (see Kyläkirjaston kuvalehti, 1889).

I have to admit that I was surprised to discover such a multifaceted story in the end. After all, I started the process of pursuing Otherness by expecting to find mostly general information to back up the issue. It seemed for a long time that Liisa Iiro would remain as a forever mystery.

Then the articles from the collection of the National Library of Finland turned the table over and the tale started to unveil. The articles, however, also had left a bunch of new questions. Who were these seers Viitasaari was well-known of? For what kind of purposes exactly they needed the remains of the body? This was the point when my “otherworldly realm” started to expand rapidly. That is, I had started to attribute difference ideologically to the Old Church Island Cemetery intensively (see Seaton, 2009). I was overwhelmed as well as frustrated. Why did I not know these tremendously fascinating things earlier? I was genuinely getting immersed with the representations of death at this point (see Martini & Buda, 2020). Next representation of death dives into the issues of witchcraft.

Witchcraft at the Old Church Island Cemetery

In the old times, Viitasaari was well known parish for its seers (Suomen kotiseutututkimuksen äänenkannattaja, 1912, pp. 11) and many of them were punished by the law (Satakunta, 1877). In Viitasaari the church and the cemetery were in an uninhabited island and, therefore, the seers were able to conduct their rituals in the area without interruptions (Kyläkirjaston kuvalehti, 1889, p. 19). An article in Satakunta (1877) explains that malicious practices were also conducted with bones of the deceased and other similar ingredients. Even grave robberies and mutilation of corpses were practiced in witchcraft purposes. Seers were the ones that utilized the objects taken from cemeteries since they possessed special powers (Lehikoinen, 2011, pp. 265–266).

A summative table combined by Lahti (2016, pp. 248–296), which is based on judicial materials of the Wasa Court of Appeal and the lower court judicial materials, elucidates judicial proceedings of witchcraft in the late 1700s Finland. According to the summative table, two cases (the first in 1784 and the second 1796), where witchcraft had been practiced in the premises of the church and churchyard, were recorded in Viitasaari. The judicial materials of Viitasaari court achieves JyMa (1783; 1784, as cited in Lahti, 2016, p. 159) reveal that Kustaa Ruuska, a citizen of Viitasaari, had taken a skull and other remains from a grave located in the Old Church Island Cemetery and taken it to his home veranda to retrieve the property that had been stolen from him. Ruuska and his accomplices have rumored to leave two coins in the grave as a collateral that they would return the body parts. The men returned the body parts into the grave. It was believed, that if body parts were taken into a place where the theft had taken place, the lost property would be restored (JyMa Viitasaari

1783; Tittonen 2009; as cited in Lahti, 2016, p. 182).

One rather well-known seer from Viitasaari was Mikko Koljonen who people travelled to visit even from afar (Keski-Suomi, 1887). The Finnish literature society's (SKS) SKVR online database contains the old poems of the Finnish people and some recordings of spells and practices of Mikko Koljonen can be found in the database. Translating or interpreting the contents and meanings of the spells is unfortunately beyond the scope of this thesis.

Furthermore, whether the spells were utilized in practice or whether the spells were rather utilized to explain different phenomena, is tremendously difficult to figure out solely based on the poems (Issakainen, 2012, p. 12). Nevertheless, I found the poems tremendously fascinating and potential for proximity tourism purposes since the poems artfully represent an otherworldly realm in which the reader can dive into through the poems if one's imagination enables it. The spells of Mikko Koljonen include some cemetery related spells and practices such as opening the door of a church without a key and encountering the church-occupant (SKVR IX4 22. Moisio Otto 235. 1890.) as well as several spells where powers of the church-folk are attempted to harness by taking various objects from the cemetery (SKVR IX4 28. Moisio Otto 309. 1890; SKVR IX4 29. Moisio Otto 330. 1890; SKVR IX4 57. Moisio Otto 236. 1890; SKVR IX4 59. Moisio Otto 210. 1890).

Finding information about the witchcraft practices and seers of Viitasaari was something unexpected and surprising. Attractive yet repulsive. The otherworldly realm I had created in my mind just kept expanding rapidly. Through these new aspects not only the place identity of the Old Church Island Cemetery but also the place identity of Viitasaari area in general started to shape (see Jeuring & Haartsen, 2017). I certainly did not expect that the Old Church Island Cemetery, as well as Viitasaari, has such a colorful past even though I engaged with the process of pursuing Otherness by adopting a mindset that there must be some interesting stories lingering at the cemetery. Suddenly the whole city was bursting mystic stories as well as reflecting history and the best part was that the stories fitted perfectly to my fields of interests. I felt proud that my hometown was a place that has such a colorful history. I was fascinated and felt proud that once upon a time the area was well known for its seers (see Suomen kotiseutututkimuksen äänenkannattaja, 1912). The power of this representation of death was in its power to shed mystical aura on top of the Old Church Island Cemetery and ability to create the passageway to the otherworldly realm (see Carter, 2019).

The beheading site of the Old Church Island and the unknown final resting place of Jägerskiöld

According to Sion (2014, p. 1) already in ancient times, dark tourism existed, and people wandered to visit graves of martyrs, catacombs, or to attend public executions. Also, in Finland executions and hangings were considered as a form of entertainment, and people traveled even from afar to witness these macabre happenings (Boström, 1929, pp. 186–187). Seers and traditional medicine practitioners were not an uncommon sight in public executions either since the blood, clothes, and other earthly remains of the beheaded were considered as valuable ingredients for spells and healing (Moilanen, 2019, pp. 197–198).

Markkanen (1983, pp. 519–522) states that in the 1790s two death penalties were carried out in Viitasaari and the beheading site of the Old Church Island was used twice in a rather short timeline. This was rather remarkable since death penalties were not common and one of the executed persons was a nobleman.

The first one who received the death penalty was a peasant who killed his brother. The victim who met his end by the hand of his own brother was buried in the Old Church Island Cemetery. According to death and burial records of the Viitasaari congregation (1790; 1791; as cited in Markkanen, 1983, p. 519) the wrongdoer, on the other hand, was not entitled to get a final resting place in the churchyard and was, thus, buried in Vesisaari. A story in Uusi Suometar (1887), explains that before meeting his end at the beheading site of the Old Church Island the peasant described rather emotionally the relationship his brother had with his father and how greediness for money filled his heart, leading him to kill his own dear brother in the desire to get his brother's share of the inheritance.

The second person who lost one's life at the beheading site of the Old Church Island was lieutenant Erik Johan Jägerskiöld who shot his farmhand. The case of Jägerskiöld drew attention in the whole country since executing a nobleman was unusual and the case triggered a rather complicated and time-consuming legal proceeding. After the legal proceeding, the court ordered that Jägerskiöld would be sentenced to death but exceptionally he would be buried in the churchyard and before the executioner would strike, homily and the sacred words of God would be read to the Jägerskiöld so that the nobleman would receive blissful

death.

According to Moilanen (2019, pp. 195–196), the folklore recordings point out that the executioner traveled to Viitasaari from Isokyrö to carry out the execution. Jägerskiöld, however, did not let the executioner carry out the execution without problems. Jägerskiöld dodged the first hit and the ax did not hit the target. During the second swing, Jägerskiöld fidgeted so that the ax drilled into his back instead. The third hit was successful and finally, the head was detached from the body. When the head was detached from the body, the shocked witnesses who had earlier climbed to sit on tree branches to witness the happenings dropped down (Uusi Suometar 1887). Moilanen (2019, pp. 195–196) describes that the tongue of Jägerskiöld was still fidgeting when the executioner lifted the severed head up in the air. On his way back to Isokyrö, the executioner told out that Jägerskiöld was the nineteenth person he had executed but he had never seen such a chap who insisted on keeping his head.

According to the list of the death 1792 in National Archives of Finland, (as cited in Markkanen, 1983, p. 521) Jägerskiöld was buried in an unknown place at the Old Church Island Cemetery. The beheading site of the Old Church Island was not needed ever since and, thus, the beheading site slowly vanished (Markkanen, 1983, p. 522). An article in Sorretun voima (1913), however, states that according to oral lore three people were beheaded at the Old Church Island and that one of the beheaded was “the priest’s Miss” who was sentenced for infanticide.

Gathering this representation of death caused me to wonder multiple times whether other people would derive the same feeling of excitement and urge to visit the place based on the story? Or would they deem visiting the cemetery based on the story trivial since there are no physical objects, other than the place itself, left to witness? The grave of Jägerskiöld is unknown, the execution site has perished. For me visiting storied places while releasing my imagination has been often enough and, thus, I perceived the representations of death gathered as a more than a legit reason to visit the Old Church Island Cemetery.

To tell truth, the representations of death gathered turned out to be even more fascinating in the end than I expected. The charm of dark tourism places is in their ability to immerse the visitor in representations of death (Martini & Buda, 2020, p. 679) and the interpretation is the linkage between dark tourism site and the visitor (Sharpley & Stone, p. 113). The

representations of death I gathered met these terms easily in the ideological level. The representations of death had created a link between me and the Old Church Island Cemetery already before the lived experience and the link was rather strong since I had gathered the representation of death by myself while concentrating solely on my fields of interest. The representations of death made the Old Church Island Cemetery appear as alluring and extraordinary place.

Through attributing differences to the Old Church Island Cemetery with the help of the representations of death (see Seaton, 2009), I had started to perceive the Old Church Island Cemetery as “other place” with a mythic joint experience (see Foucault, 1986). The mythic joint experience established mentally through the process of pursuing the Other was an otherworldly realm where the local myths and legends lived on and the Old Church Island Cemetery was the main theatre of happenings. Based on the pre-understanding, I imagined the Old Church Island Cemetery as mythic and aura laden place where the past lingers, and I anticipated that the physical appearance of the cemetery would align with the picture I had painted in my mind. That is, I expected to visit an old fascinating cemetery with unique atmosphere, some old gravestones and asymmetrical placement of the graves.

5.2 Lived dark proximity tourism experiences at the Old Church Island Cemetery

This subchapter discusses two rather different lived experiences that I underwent at the Old Church Island Cemetery during the thesis process. The autoethnographic accounts presented in the chapter are drafted based on the field notes taken during the visits. Specifically, the parts of narratives where emotions, senses, feelings, embodiment, and expressions referring to one’s meaning-making process (see Schorch, 2014), as well as parts of narratives describing the phenomenon in a fundamental and revealing manner (Van Manen, 1990, p. 93), are taken under scrutiny in the analysis and discussion parts that follow the autoethnographic narratives. The autoethnographic accounts themselves, however, include other aspects as well so that the reader can grasp the experiences holistically and get an understanding of the Old Church Island Cemetery as a place.

On-site experience: The First visit

We are walking towards the Old Church Island Cemetery with my friend. It is a beautiful winter day and the ice of the lake is still strong enough so that the trip to the island by walking is possible. It is slippery and we cannot find the cemetery right away. I have not visited the cemetery before, and the last time my friend visited the cemetery was a considerably long time ago. After wandering around the island for a while, we notice a fence in the forest. That must be it. We follow the shoreline until we see a path leading uphill. Huge spruce trees are framing the pathway to the cemetery. After a while, we arrive to the gate of the cemetery (Figure 4).



Figure 4. The gate (Linnakoski, 2020).

The entrance seems a bit eerie. The gate is rather unique, and I feel rather excited. I take off my mittens and open the gate. A cold wind bites into my hands before I shove them back into the mittens after I have closed the gate after us. There is an old mortuary next to the entrance of the cemetery. Through pre-studying the cemetery before the visit, I learned that the mortuary was relocated here from Haapasaari in the 1950s (Viitasaaren Hautausmaa, n. d.).

I take a sneak peek inside through the keyhole. Nothing worth mentioning in there. From the outside the mortuary itself, however, looks exquisite. There is moss growing on the roof.

We follow the path leading to the monument which is located approximately in the middle of the cemetery. The monument indicates the spot where the churches were in the past and states that “The first three churches of the Viitasaari congregation, which were built in 1895, 1653 and 1777, were located here. The third church was deconstructed and relocated to Haapasaari during the years 1877–1878. Lord, thou hast been our refuge from generation to generation – Psalms 90:1” (Figure 5). We walk slowly while talking rather quietly with each other even though there is no one else in the cemetery. It is silent.



Figure 5. The memorial (Linnakoski, 2020).

Not far behind the monument, the remains of the wine cellar can be found (Figure 6). Through pre-studying I knew that there were remains of a wine cellar somewhere at the cemetery. I also saw a picture of the remains in a book. However, I am surprised how well preserved the remains of the wine cellar still are. There are footprints leading into the wine cellar and, therefore, I decide to crawl down and look inside as well. The space is tiny, and I detect a slight musty odor. Darkness of the cellar feels soothing. Soon after I climb back up.



Figure 6. Remains of the wine cellar (Linnakoski, 2020).

We start to investigate headstones and headstone inscriptions. There are footprints in the snow and by looking at them it is obvious that others have been doing the same activity recently. Some of the inscriptions of the headstones are unreadable. In older headstones professions, that no longer exist, are often presented. Thus, it is interesting to pay attention to the professions the people used to have that no longer exist. Furthermore, I have always enjoyed reading the names inscribed in headstones since often interesting old names can be found. Indeed, I find cemeteries and headstones very inspirational in many ways.

I like the fact that the cemetery is not cared for too keenly and the cemetery is pretty much in nature state (Figure 7). The atmosphere of the cemetery is rather different compared to usually well cared for new cemeteries. It feels like mysteries dwell in the area. I can imagine that during the nighttime the cemetery would be charged with a different kind of aura. Maybe I will come back during the nighttime sometime.



Figure 7. Nature state prevails at the cemetery (Linnakoski, 2020).

After strolling around for some time while investigating headstones, we start to head back. Some other people have arrived at the cemetery now, and they are in the middle of investigating the memorial of the cemetery. Our eyes meet. I force a friendly smile and greet them on our way towards the exit even though I do not know them.

The narrative above describes my first ever visit the Old Church Island Cemetery. My pre-understanding of the place was constituted around rather vast literary knowledge and the representations of death discovered through the pursuit of Otherness. The very essence of the cemetery as a physical place as well as social and cultural structures embodied regulated my

overall behavior (see Casey, 1996; Korkiakangas, 2004) during the lived experience and, therefore, in the autoethnographic account aspects of walking slowly, talking quietly as well as looking for justification through footprints to crawl down to the remains of the wine cellar are present. Solemnity, remembrance, and respect are attributes connected to cemeteries in general (Tanas, 2004, p. 75), and I also wished to adhere to these attributes while pursuing cemetery tourism.

Through the theories of proximity tourism and dark tourism, the Otherness experienced during the cemetery visit can be rather well de-structured and understood as an intrinsic element of the dark proximity tourism experience both mentally and physically. In the autoethnographic account, the Otherness experienced during the visit may seem to stem mostly from physical aspects at first glance. My emotional and bodily responses towards the physical environment, such as curiosity and fascination towards mortuary and remains of the wine cellar as well as urge to explore and to take a look inside both of them, indicates that the I did not perceive the cemetery as “normal environment” consumed on regular basis per se (see Richards, 2017, p. 9).

The Otherness that stemmed from ideological aspects was not absent during the lived experience even though the autoethnographic account does not distinctively express ideological aspects in readable form in the narrative. Some meanings remain on embodiment level and cannot put into words since they are internal understandings (Schorch, 2014, p. 22). Thus, even though the autoethnographic account does not verbally express how Otherness derived from the representations of death during the lived experience, the Otherness and inherent meanings provided by the death-related stories should be still considered as an inevitable part of the lived experience. That is, the meaning-making process and increasing knowledge had taken place already before the lived experience. The attributed meanings and knowledge influenced my perceiving process as well as caused the overall state of excitement and enthusiasm. Fascination towards the site was, thus, mostly caused by my pre-understanding as well as my background as a cemetery enthusiast as well as folklore enthusiast. It is essential to acknowledge this aspect, since the practice of doing dark tourism in one's proximate environment was small-scale and unprompted. The Old Church Island Cemetery has no tourist infrastructure or tourism products and, therefore, experiencing Otherness and contemplating the representations during the lived experience were highly dependent on my capabilities of adopting a mindset that supported the lived dark proximity

tourism experience.

Emotions of fascination and awe prevailing during the first on-site experience were highly connected to my pre-understanding of the place. Considering the rather emotional process of pursuing Otherness and my roles as a local community member, cemetery enthusiast as well as a folklore enthusiast, it can be thought that my sentient body connected with the Old Church Island Cemetery already before the on-site experience through building the emotional attachment towards the site (see Ahmed, 2004, pp. 27–31; Miller & Rivera, 2006). In this sense, emotions of excitement and fascination prevailing in the autoethnographic account should thought to represent to some extent the intensity of the visit when my sentient and knowing body interacted with the meaning-laden place. The emotions felt during the process of pursuing the Other should likewise considered to be almost inseparable from the lived experience. The setting of my lived experience was rather different from example heritage tourist products where the tourists builds knowledge primary during the lived experience and engages in the hermeneutic process during the lived experience or afterwards.

Discovering death-related historical stories of the Old Church Island Cemetery and knowing that the cemetery had been “theater” of fascinating macabre happenings charged the cemetery with extraordinary aura. The untamed outlook of the cemetery perceived during the lived experience, maintained and enhanced the aura perceived during the experience (see Seaton, 2009, pp. 87–88). The mental image of a “auratic place” built before the lived experience, therefore, was supported by the physical features of the Old Church Island Cemetery while causing the place to appear mysterious during the lived experience. The way I perceived the place during the lived experience cannot be understood without acknowledging that I considered the Old Church Island Cemetery as an extraordinary place due to its mysterious and extraordinary macabre history. This implies, that the ideologically attributed Otherness can in some situations also stem from the place itself to some extent when the knowing sentient body interacts and relates with the meaning-laden place. Places do not simply exist on their own, they happen through sentient knowing subjects (Casey, 1996).

The autoethnographic account describing the lived experience is strongly entertainment and enjoyment driven. The mixed emotional experience often connected to dark tourism (see Martini & Buda, 2020, p. 680; Zheng et al., 2019, p. 105) seems to be absent. However, looking back to the pre-understanding and the roles I possessed is once again needed to

analytically understand why the aspect of mixed emotional experience seemed to be missing and positive emotions of fascination as well as enthusiasm took over during the lived experience. The reason for this is the fact that the negative emotions, such as disgust and awe, linked to the representations of death that worked as the main source of Otherness were dealt by me already during the process of pursuing Otherness and transformed into attachments and meanings towards the Old Church Island Cemetery rather systematically. That is, my roles as a cemetery enthusiast as well as folklore enthusiast contributed to the process of turning the negative emotions into meanings and attachments towards the place. My interest towards a cultural history of death, cemeteries as well as Finnish belief tradition, therefore, rather systematically turned the “macabre stories” into something meaningful instead of causing me to “dwell” in the negative emotions aroused by the stories or to ignore the narratives related to dark tourism site. Polysemic dark tourism sites awake various responses in different stakeholders and narratives of dark tourism places can be accepted respectfully, ignored, resisted, or denied (Seaton, 2009).

On-site experience The Second visit

This time I am alone. It has not been long since the last time I was here. It is early in the morning and the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions just came into effect in Finland. The future seems rather uncertain since the pandemic canceled my student exchange abroad in short notice and required me to make swift decisions and changes to my plans. I am feeling a bit restless and fidgety today but I know it is about the last time that I can access the island by walking, so I push myself to visit the Old Church Island Cemetery despite.

This time I find the cemetery without any problems. I walk up the hill until I reach the gate. I notice that the lower branches of the spruce trees framing the pathway are missing. Apparently, the lower branches are missing due to esthetical reasons and anyhow the trees are not karsikko trees by judging their features. Nevertheless, the detail reminds me of the rather fascinating death-related karsikko tradition practiced in central Finland in the past. Karsikko tree was pine or spruce which branches were trimmed apart from one or two branches (Vilkuna, 1992, pp. 45–52). According to Hyry, Pentikäinen & Pentikäinen (1992, p. 86), in eastern and central Finland karsikko trees were made while escorting the corpse of the deceased from home to the burial site. The purpose of the karsikko was to work as a

boundary between the living and the dead. It was believed that karsikko trees prevented the dead from wandering since the dead recognized the debranched trees and, thus, the dead would not cross the boundary (Vilkuna, 1992, pp. 207–209).

As my mind stops wandering I pause the music and take off the headphones. It is silent and I am almost sure that there is no one else at the cemetery during this time. I put the headphones back on and turn on the music while, however, keeping the volume considerably low. As I enter the graveyard my vigilance increases. The atmosphere feels different already right at the beginning. Somehow oppressive. This time I do not need to peek inside the mortuary. Been there done that. Neither do I enter the wine cellar remains. I find myself staring at the remains considerably long time though. I stop the music once again and take off my headphones.

During this visit, my mind seems to drift differently, and the visit is more like the ones I am used to having when I drop by at cemeteries randomly without any pre-investigation or guided tours. Since I am alone, there is more room for contemplation. Just wandering around, pondering, and letting my mind drift freely from topic to another. Thinking about the times I worked in a cemetery and a guided cemetery tour I once participated in Finland. Suddenly I am pleased that I am alone and free to enjoy tranquility and serenity. The atmosphere at the cemeteries, in general, are perfect for contemplation. I stop for a while by a specific headstone which story, I heard last time from my friend. I continue strolling around while staring at the inscriptions of the headstones. My mind is, however, rather distracted today so I start to head back. On my way back I run into a few stones I am not quite sure if they are headstones or not. I like to think that they are. Once I reach the gate I put on my headphones and turn on the music. I close the cemetery gate after me.

I walk back to the car and rub hand sanitizer into my hands which I am carrying around due to COVID-19. I flinch. In this context the smell of the hand sanitizer evokes unexpected memories that I do not even want to have words to describe. Maybe it is because I just visited a cemetery but suddenly, I connect the smell of hand sanitizer to hospitals and dying people. I open the car door and wait for memories, sadness, and anxiousness to fade away alongside with the smell of the hand sanitizer.

Since the first visit, I had only slightly increased my general knowledge of the death-related Finnish folk belief traditions. Site-specific knowledge had not been increased between the visits through literature. However, this time I was familiar with the Old Church Island Cemetery as a physical environment due to the previous lived experience. The increased general literal knowledge, such as karsikko tree tradition, affected the way I observed and felt the physical environment, causing me to observe visual stimulus through a new mindset.

Even though I realized rather swiftly that the trees I noticed right next to the entrance were not karsikko trees, my imagination had already built the connection with the “otherworldly space” where Finnish folk belief tradition prevailed. In a sense, through my imagination and knowledge, I established a connection with the Finnish cultural history of death through the emotion of fascination triggered by the observations. That is, perception of space is constructed as much through imagination as through physical experiencing (Seaton, 2009, p. 96). Lived experience and perception enables entering the space (Casey, 1996). This connection should not be considered insignificant especially considering my background as a folklore enthusiast and local community member (see Craig and Thompson, 2012, p. 183). Sensory and emotive contextualization leads to subjective internal understandings that are always more felt than spoken experiences (Schorch, 2014, pp. 28–29). Even though I entered the “space” where I dealt and felt the past events within my body (see Knudsen, 2011, pp. 58–59) through a rather unintentional and irrelevant outside stimulus, the experience was inevitably affected by the knowledge I had gained through the literature already prior lived experience. Furthermore, I had attributed Otherness to the Old Church Island Cemetery causing the place itself to be auratic in my eyes already before the lived experience took place. These factors combined, enabled entering the “otherworldly space” through a rather insignificant stimulus. In my case this is relevant, since as discussed earlier, reflecting the stories and cultural history of death during the experiences were highly dependent on my capability to recall the knowledge during the lived experience. Knowledge is sensed, understood, and perceived through the sentient body of a tourist (Knudsen, 2011, pp. 58–59) and, therefore, my role must be acknowledged as a critical element of the lived experiences.

The autoethnographic account above is rather different compared to the previous autoethnographic account in many ways. This time I was alone. Furthermore, my state of being was tense, to begin with. Damasio (1999, pp. 51–52) explains that one’s well-being, cheerfulness, enthusiasm, malaise, calm, and tension are background emotions that stem from

internal causes. The background emotions are not conspicuous (Damasio, 2003, p. 43) even though background emotions can affect to details such as body posture, speed, eye movements, thoughts, and behavior (Damasio, 1999, p. 43–52). Background emotions, however, represent one's state of "being" (Damasio, 2003, p. 44). Thus, my sentient body, which was tense could not achieve easily the mindset enabling sensing Otherness through the representations of death. I had not remarkably increased knowledge of the place since the last visit, and thus, pursuing Otherness through representations during the lived experience was a struggle apart from the unintentional connection established to karsikko tree tradition. Emotions of enthusiasm and fascination that stemmed from the representations of death, therefore, were absent during the lived experience apart from the karsikko tree case described earlier.

The autoethnographic account, however, responds rather well the cemetery visits I usually have without conscious agenda of pursuing Otherness through representations of death. The fact that Otherness is not pursued consciously through representations of death does not automatically mean, that Otherness cannot be experienced in cemeteries even in cases where the physical appearance of the cemetery would be already familiar as well. The Otherness of death is the greatest of all Others (Seaton, 2009, pp. 83–84). The fact of being alone permitted me to concentrate more freely on my own thoughts and contemplation. Seeking the meaning behind death and reflecting life in places where death is present is natural for humans (Miller & Rivera, 2006, pp. 334–335). Cemeteries are places where dead people rest and, thus, it is not surprising that cemetery as a physical place can itself trigger voluminous experiences if a mindset that enables mortality contemplation prevails.

The physical essence of cemeteries seems to fit well for situations where the background emotion is negatively toned, and one is in need to re-think the meaning of life for a reason for another. This can enable contemplation of death itself more efficiently than being all fascinated and excited for example due to fascinating representations of death. Cemeteries are multifaceted and while they may arouse negative emotions such as sorrow and frustration, feelings of enthusiasm and cultural consciousness may also appear (Pliberšek & Vrban, 2018, p. 196). I enjoy both the feeling of excitement and fascination as well as the sulky feeling of pondering the meaning of life. In my case, intense contemplation mortality rarely takes place in the immediate presence of others, but I rather need my own space and time for in-depth contemplation. If cemeteries are visited with the right kind of prevailing mindset and under

favorable conditions, they tend to offer space for contemplation. Stone (2012, p. 1582) explains that dark tourism experiences wield potential to encourage contemplation of death, meanings of ontology, and ponder both life and death in the light of mortality. The level of contemplation, or whether it happens at all, however, greatly varies depending on the visitor and nature of dark tourism sites.

The previous cemetery tourism experiences that I recall, similarly speak behalf of the fact that the state of one's being, as well as relation to others, influences highly the cemetery visits both in behavioral and mental level. Being alone enables getting into space where contemplation of death takes place (see Stone, 2012, p. 1565) as well as where imagination wanders freely. The presence of others, on the other hand, seems to "break the spell" in midstream. In general, I perceive visiting cemeteries in the practice of doing tourism more socially acceptable alone or in small groups than as a part of a physical guided tour. One reason for this is my previous experience of a guided cemetery tour where being part of a big joyful and a rather loud tourist group among people reminiscing their close ones caused strong feelings of embarrassment and shame. This experience can be seen meaningful since it pointed out the meaning of respectfulness and how I perceive that respectfulness should be adhered to in cemeteries while practicing tourism. The experience also pointed out the cons of large-scale tourism activities at the cemetery premises and how they affect the authenticity and spiritual aspects perceived. Managing a dark tourism site inappropriate to the essence of the site can shatter and distract the aura and erode Otherness (Seaton, 2009, pp. 87–88).

The physical aspects of Otherness, that were prominent during my first ever visit to the Old Church Island, were not so outstanding during the second lived experience. That is due to my increased concept of knowing the place itself through the previous experience. The previous experience at the cemetery changed the way how I interpreted and sensed the physical environment. For example, the physical aspects that aroused curiosity last time, such as mortuary and the wine cellar, had lost some of their charm in my eyes. During the second visit I did not feel the urge to peek inside of the mortuary or to crawl down into the remains of the wine cellar to satisfy my curiosity. That is, my knowing body did not perceive exquisite "Otherness" in these physical objects anymore. The Otherness the place provided at physical level had somewhat eroded (see Seaton, 2009). However, the autoethnographic account points out that during the visit I paid attention towards a specific headstone which this time, had a story to tell. That is, the meaning of the headstone had enhanced in my eyes. It had a story to

tell. Places regenerate and even though the same place is visited multiple times the place is different due to the ability of places to be dynamic and gather experiences, expectations, histories, memories (Casey, 1996).

The Otherness I experienced during the second visit stemmed mostly from the Otherness of death itself and contemplation of life and death. Even though it first seemed that I was not able to concentrate specifically on anything due to prevailing overall emotion of tenseness, the cemetery as a physical environment soothed me and helped me to senses tranquility and serenity despite the tension. The smell of the hand sanitizer triggered the unexpected intense contemplation of death once I had already exited the cemetery. I guess that the visit to the Old Church Island Cemetery had established space for mortality contemplation (see Stone, 2012, p. 1565) in which I apparently remained momentarily after the lived experience. Maybe in my case, the mortality contemplation stepped in only at the point when I reached the car and knew I did not have to follow my thoughts and actions anymore? Maybe this was the point I perceived safe to contemplate more intimate issues when the notebook for the field notes was safely in the depths of my backpack?

The smell of the hand sanitizer took me to a rather “dark space” where I went through my memories related to death and fears related to the death of my closed ones to an extend that I even wanted to get rid of the emotions that emerged. This was the point of the experience where intense negative emotions of sadness, sympathy, fear, afraid as well as compassion took place. The relationship towards death itself was something more intensive and affective during the second lived experience. The thoughts that came to my mind are too personal and something that I am not willing to share in the study in more detail. However, running into such thoughts is not rare when practicing cemetery tourism. Interpreting negative emotions in dark tourism is not simple since negative emotions might not be interpreted as bad (Nawijn et al., 2016, p. 245). I tend to think of these kinds of issues often while I wander in cemeteries without the exact agenda of pursuing Otherness through representations of death. I think that occasionally, it is good and soothing to acknowledge the mortality of human beings in a relevant environment. To realize what ultimately matters in the end.

5.3 Making sense of meaning-making in the light of emotions and feelings

This sub-chapter discusses in more detail the variety of emotions and feelings that took place during the stages of pre-experience, on-site experiences, and post-experience. Furthermore, based on the emotions and feelings, the meaning-making process is discussed in the light of hermeneutic phenomenology.

Pre-experience

I am overwhelmed by the fact that I found out interesting death-related myths and legends about my hometown that are something completely new and exciting. These stories are valuable, inspirational, and immemorial indeed and I am happy I went through all the effort to discover them. Instead of seeing the opportunities right next to me, I have been conducting rather similar tourism practices elsewhere. I love the fact that my hometown has such a vivid history and clear linkages to the Finnish folk belief traditions. After discovering the macabre history of the Old Church Island Cemetery my interest and curiosity towards the place sparked.

The autoethnographic account above indicate that the emotions of awe, pride and fascination took place already before the lived experiences when knowledge related to the Old Church Island Cemetery was increased through gathering representations of death. It is rather essential to acknowledge that the site-specific information I familiarized myself during the pre-experience stage while seeking Otherness was nuanced, detailed, and within my exact interests as folklore enthusiast and cemetery enthusiast. The findings caused strong emotions of awe, fascination as well as pride. I engaged with the process of pursuing Otherness with a mindset that there must be some interesting stories at the Old Church Island Cemetery, but I did not think that such a colorful macabre history would be unveiled during the process. Thus, emotions of awe stepped in. The emotion of pride, on the other hand, stepped in because of my role as a folklore enthusiast merged with the role of a local community member. The unveiled history of the Old Church Island Cemetery was something valuable and extraordinary in my eyes and I felt proud of being a part of local community where the Finnish folk belief traditions had been so strong in the past. Emotions wield the power to connect sentient subjects to places in varying intensities (Ahmed, 2004, pp. 27–31). Places

that contribute to the local culture or are source of local myths potentially cause locals to be sentimental and affectionate towards the place (Miller & Rivera, 2006). The process of gathering representations of death not only enhanced the place image of the Old Church Island Cemetery, but the whole regional image in my mind (see Jeuring and Haartsen, 2017, pp. 120–137).

How come I have not visited the Old Church Island Cemetery earlier? Clearly my knowledge has been lacking even though I actively read about Finnish folk belief traditions from different sources. Why I had not heard any of the macabre stories related to the Old Church Island Cemetery earlier? It is true that the stories I discovered were unholy and somewhat disgusting. Grave robberies and stealing remains are rather disturbing thoughts. But is it not in the nature of humans to be interested in hearing such stories from the past? The linkage of stories to Finnish folk belief tradition and heritage is obvious. The linkage adds tremendous value to the stories.

Emotions of disgust, compassion, and embarrassment also took place during the pre-experience stage as well. Whereas emotions of disgust and compassion were linked to the emotions aroused by the death-related macabre historical stories discovered, the emotion of embarrassment was connected to the realization that my information related to my proximate surroundings had been lacking. My role as a cemetery enthusiast as well as folklore enthusiast intensified the feeling of embarrassment. It was rather shocking to find out that a place that responded ideologically my desired practices of doing tourism and field of interest had been in my proximate surroundings all along without me realizing it.

In my case, the pre-experience stage included dealing with emotions that often take place during the lived experience in dark tourism practices where the knowledge is provided for the visitor at the site. This is important to note since the issue affects the structure of the experience as well as emotions felt during the lived experience. For example, the emotions of disgust and compassion related to the macabre stories were death with prior lived experience. The feeling of disgust stemming from example from grave robberies and executions that took place in the Old Church Island Cemetery in the past were rather quickly turned into meanings that enhanced the place identity due to my roles as a cemetery enthusiast as well as folklore enthusiast. The compassion level remained rather low since distant past events and victims were hard to relate on an emotional level. The emotion of slight compassion stemmed mostly

from the knowledge regarding the contemporary practices of the grave robberies which I deem unrespectable and disgusting. The heroes and villains from the distant past, however, provided Otherness and mysticism effectively for the Old Church Island Cemetery once I had dealt with the emotional responses the discovered stories inflicted and considered myths and legends as part of Finnish folk belief traditions that once prevailed in the region.

Thus, in my case, negative emotions related to the myths and legends were turned rather swiftly into meanings already before engaging with the Old Church Island Cemetery physically. This is an important aspect since the intensity level of the dark tourism experience is argued to be linked to visitors the engagement, responses, and felt sense of the responsibility (Knudsen, 2011, pp. 58–59). The emotions felt during the pre-experience stage as well as the knowledge and the meanings built, should be considered as an integral part of the lived experiences that took place later on.

The first on-site experience

The lived experience took place through subjects knowing sentient body (Casey, 1996) in an unexplored meaning-laden place where I had attributed difference ideologically (see Seaton, 2009) through the representations of death. I engaged with the first on-site experience with enthusiasm due to my pre-understanding of the place.

From the autoethnographic account describing the first on-site experience (see chapter 5.2), emotions of awe and fascination can be detected. The fascination felt during the lived experience stemmed both from the physical aspects as well as from the ideological aspects. The way I perceived the physical environment during the lived experience should be thought as a process where the landscape, pre-understanding, and the current experience interacted with each other (see Åström et al., 2014, p. 7). Collective history lingering in the environment can only be understood by those who recognize what the environment tells (Åström et al., 2014, p. 7).

I find it challenging if not even impossible to make a clear distinction between the ideological and physical aspects of emotions of fascination and awe that took place during the lived experience. Even though the unforeseen physical environment triggered certain behaviors in me, such as urge and curiosity to take a look inside the mortuary and the wine cellar remains,

it is hard to tell whether the unseen physical environment triggered the behavior solely or whether the ideological aspects that I had attributed towards the site triggered the behavior. Rather, the triggered behavior should be considered as a result of sentient subject engaging with the meaning-laden environment that was yet to discover. Through attributing differences to the place by utilizing the representations of death and folk belief traditions it is adequate to state that I considered the Old Church Island Cemetery as “Other space”. Alongside the real place, a mythic joint experience thus existed (Foucault, 1986) and to which I connected with my affective body while engaging and interpreting the physical environment (see Knudsen 2017; Knudsen, 2011). Thus, the mysticism and otherworldly I attributed to the Old Church Island Cemetery prior lived experience very likely affected the way how I perceived things during the lived experience.

The second on-site experience

The second lived experience took place through the knowing sentient body (Casey, 1996) in a meaning-laden place where I had attributed difference ideologically (Seaton, 2009, pp. 77–83) through the representations of death. This time, however, a place that I had previous experiences was visited. Pre-understanding with which I engaged with the second on-site experience was, therefore, a combination of pre-experiences and the first on-site experience described earlier in the sub-chapter. I engaged the second on-site experience in a state of being tense due to internal causes (see Damasio, 1999).

The autoethnographic account describing the second on-site experience (see chapter 5.2) reveal that emotions of compassion, fascination, sympathy, gratitude, sadness, anxiousness, and fear took place during the second lived experience. The emotion of fascination during the lived experience stems from a moment where the imagination opens the passageway to the “otherworldly realm” which I had created during the pre-experience stage with the help of the representations of death. However, during the second lived experience I was otherwise struggling to draw fascination from the representations of death. I was alone and the mind seemed to drift from topic to another erratically during the lived experience. Despite the prevailing background emotion of tension, I started the lived experience with, also tranquility and serenity were sensed while wandering at the cemetery.

The emotions of sadness, compassion, sympathy, gratitude, afraid, and fear appeared once I engaged with a safe “space” where my mind was able to reflect death in the light of my own life and relations (see Stone & Sharpley, 2008, p. 589). Dark tourism does not only provide a physical place where the living encounters death but establishes also space where one can contemplate the meaning of mortality (Stone, 2012, p. 1565). The potential of a dark tourism place as well as individuals’ affective responses to death influence in the end how space is interacted and related (Martini & Buda, 2020, pp. 680–684). Whether a dark tourism site engages the visitor in thoughts of their mortality varies (Walter, 2009).

Post-experience

The post-experience stage includes all the previous stages as well as all the emotions and feelings that occurred after the stages. The post-experience stage is dynamic, multilayered, and sets the pre-understanding for the possible upcoming lived experiences. In my case the post-experience stage was highly reflective due to my role as a researcher and thus, the knowledge and reflections affected the way the Old Church Island Cemetery was perceived.

After discovering death-related myths and legends related to the Old Church Island Cemetery as well as visiting the place it is clear that the Old Church Island Cemetery is one of the places I will recommend visiting in Viitasaari. Cemeteries in general hold secrets and reflect heritage. Somehow the Old Church Island Cemetery, however, seems extraordinary, inspirational, and mythic place now that I have discovered some of its macabre past. Endless amounts of stories exist in cemeteries and I dare to claim that I have only scratched the surface. It is fascinating and inspirational to realize that such an extraordinary place which is the theatre of many macabre happenings exists on my home turf. While I consider the macabre stories as interesting and valuable accounts of the past, I acknowledge that sharing such macabre and unholy stories related to a cemetery, which is often perceived as a holy place, may seem unacceptable for some people. Compiling and sharing the representations of death related to the Old Church Island Cemetery aroused incoherent feelings in other ways as well. I was excited and proud to bring the stories to light yet somewhat reluctant to share the stories for the sake of my research. Writing the stories down as representations of death and sharing them turned was something of great personal importance. While sharing the representations of death compiled based on my fields of interests I felt like sharing parts of

my intimate otherworldly realm that had become something meaningful to me.

Embarrassment, fascination, disgust, guilt, awe, and pride are emotions that came out once I scrutinized the whole journey I had gone through reflexively. In the post-experience stage, the emotion of pride stemmed from similar reasons that in the pre-experience stage. That is, the Old Church Island Cemetery contributes to the history and culture of the local community by being a source of local myths causing me to be affective and sentimental (Miller & Rivera, 2006, pp. 334–335) towards the Old Church Island Cemetery as place. Furthermore, the regional pride and awareness (Jeuring & Haartsen, 2017, pp. 120–137) increased comprehensively since during the process of pursuit of Otherness I discovered that Viitasaari in general has a colorful past of its own that I was completely unaware of. Through the lived experiences and increased knowledge, the feeling of proudness and enjoyment intensified. Being part of the local community created value for the place, since in the eyes of folklore enthusiasts the fact that the Old Church Island Cemetery and its surroundings were the “theatre” in which the happenings took place.

The response towards representations of death that discussed of deaths that took place generations ago was strong and significant since the deaths depicted in the representations of death were of one’s ancestors and local historical figures (see Walter, 2009). Narratives and affect are intertwined and make sense only through one’s own relations (Schorch, 2014, p. 23). Thus, the strong sense of belonging and being local affected the way how the representations of death were responded to (see Walter, 2009). However, probably not all the locals could relate with the feeling of proudness since not everyone wants to highlight “the macabre and shameful past”. Presumably, in my case, the roles of a local community member and cemetery enthusiast as well as folklore enthusiast intertwined together while contributing me to perceive “macabre past” as an extraordinary fascinating asset to be proud of. Construction of place meanings is in the first hand dependent on how visitors experience, feel, imagine and understand sites of death and how negative feelings are transformed and meanings sought (Zheng et al., 2019).

Fascination and awe felt at the post-experience stage similarly stemmed from ideological sources presented and attributed already in the pre-experience stage through knowledge building. Due to my background as a cemetery enthusiast as well as folklore enthusiast, the stories discovered to pursue Otherness were attractive and effective in a sense that I was able

to perceive the Old Church Island Cemetery as meaning-laden, dynamic, as well as mythical “Other space” where the past can be connected with (see Foucault, 1986; Knudsen, 2011). Furthermore, in my point of view, death-related stories charge the space with an intense and mystical aura that inevitably sets the place visited apart from the mundane everyday life (see Seaton, 2009) even though tangible objects related to the stories no longer exists. Blom (2000, pp. 29–36) suggests that morbid tourism and myth tourism have a close relationship since people might not want all the answers to the questions lingering in their minds so that the opportunity to be creative and envision remains. Valk and Sävborg (2018, p. 10) rather aptly state that when places are storied, the visitor turns from the passive participant into an active participant. The story world, landscape, and people create a realm together.

The physical elements of the lived experience, such as the untamed appearance of the cemetery as well as the absence of tourism infrastructure, supported the mysterious aura connected ideologically to the Old Church Island Cemetery while intensifying image of the place as “Other space”. Thus, since the emotion of fascination towards the cemetery remained at the post-experience stage, it is presumable that the Old Church Island Cemetery as a physical place met the expectations built mentally during the pre-experience stage.

Disgust, guilt, and embarrassment felt during the post-experience stage are related to the role of a researcher. Whereas the role as a researcher supported reflexivity and helped to perceive nuances for example in the representations of death, the role as a researcher on the other hand collided with the roles of folklore enthusiast as well as cemetery enthusiast while causing the feelings of disgust, guilt and embarrassment. As a member of the local community, I felt a responsibility towards the cemetery and, therefore, I was a bit reluctant to share and felt guilt for sharing meaningful stories that emanate the culture of the community for the sake of research. Turning a place, that had become meaningful and towards which I felt attachment, into a research subject was a somewhat disgusting aspect. That is most likely the reason why the second lived experience was what it was. Observing one’s spirituality right at the spot seemed to erode the spirituality of the experience and chase away the inner thoughts. Synesthetic triggers, however, were able to lure out inner thoughts and emotions during moments that were considered safe.

Embarrassment appeared once the theoretical knowledge level increased during the research process and thoughts such as whether the representations of death gathered were something

the community wants to preserve especially in the context of a cemetery emerged. Dark tourism wields potential to turn things that may have otherwise forgotten into something remarkable through storytelling and experiences of involvement with death (Dermody, 2017, pp. 195–196). Different thing, however, is what people want to remember and what they do not want to remember. The aura I shed to the Old Church Island Cemetery through the representations of death was not sacred but rather unholy (see Seaton, 2009). Cemeteries are sacred and unique emotional spaces representing historical memories and events the communities do not want to forget (Millán et al., 2019, p. 7). Thus, my representations of death were kind of breaking the norm and disturbing the essence of cemeteries. From the perspective of a cemetery enthusiast and folklore enthusiast, it was clear that the death-related stories were something worth preserving and discussing of but the aspect that others might deem enthusiasm unacceptable was the source embarrassment since I was also a member of a local community.

Using the death-related stories for the research should not be deemed improper, however. The representations of death were collected for my own purposes primarily and based on my own fields of interests. Pursuing Otherness through the representations of death can be considered rather successful since the stories matched exactly my interests and the stories were able to provide Otherness as well as the representations of death were able to shape the place image perceived. This was a source of awe. Adopting a different mindset was the key to finding Otherness in one's proximate environment.

The visits to the Old Island Cemetery during different stages of the thesis process as well as with different levels of knowledge demonstrated that the key to finding Otherness relied on mental escape. That is, attributing differences ideologically (see Seaton, 2009) through building knowledge, or mentally engaging with a safe “space” enabling contemplation of death. There is no only one way of practicing cemetery tourism but rather, voluminous experiences can be obtained through representations of death as well as through independent mortality contemplation in favorable conditions. The level of knowledge, however, affected tremendously the expectations and enthusiasm to visit the site as well as the intensity of the lived experience through enhancing the place identity perceived. The dark proximity tourism experience was, therefore, a process where all the stages of pre-experience, on-site experience, and post-experience should be considered as inseparable entities interacting with each other constantly and dynamically.

6. Conclusions

This autoethnographic study examined endeavors to practice dark proximity tourism on the Old Church Island Cemetery in Viitasaari. The study provided insights on the pursuit of Otherness in one's proximate environment as well as contributed to understanding small-scale non-commercialized lived dark proximity tourism experiences. These insights may establish a ground for new ways of understanding and realizing that unheard and fascination stories worth hearing exist right next to us and, thus, advocate proximity tourism, cemetery tourism, and social change.

In this study, the idea of pursuing Otherness in one's proximate environment was applied in the context of dark tourism. In the theoretical level, Otherness of death has been linked to the context of dark tourism (see Seaton, 2009) as well as cemeteries have been described as places having a mythic joint experience "Other space" that exists along with the real place (Foucault, 1986). The previous studies in proximity tourism argue that adopting a different mindset may help to perceive familiar places in a new light and help to apply tourism practices in a proximate environment (e.g. Diaz-Soria, 2016; Jeurig & Diaz-Soria, 2017). The concept of Otherness, thus, created a fruitful ground for drawing together the concepts of dark tourism and proximity tourism. The study sought to answer to the main research question: What kind of lived experience dark proximity tourism is?

The Otherness derived from the representations of death contributed to the perceived place identity of the Old Church Island already before the lived experiences. The representations of death caused the Old Church Island Cemetery to appear ideologically as a fascinating "otherworldly" place reflecting local history and to be proud of. That is, an emotional connection towards the Old Church Island Cemetery was built through the process of pursuing Otherness prior to engaging with the lived experiences. Furthermore, the process of pursuing Otherness through death-related myths and legends indicated that around us, dozens of unheard stories exist, and knowing them, may help us to see our familiar environment in a new light and as alluring for implementing tourism practices.

After the pursuit of Otherness and turning the Old Church Island Cemetery ideologically into a fascinating "otherworldly" place that was worth visiting, the two lived experiences studied

took place. Through the hermeneutic phenomenology paradigm, the study adopted, the focus was on subjective experience, inherent meanings expressed in the stories as well as on understanding and explaining the world just as the individual realizes it (Kafle, 2011). The autoethnography as a research method was helpful in the study since it provided access to the intimate and nuanced thoughts and experiences of a cemetery enthusiast who understood inherently the socio-cultural context under scrutiny through being a member of the local community. Local knowledge is experiential per se if the knowing subject has attained the knowledge through localities (Casey, 1996, p. 18).

The fundamental idea through which the lived experiences were studied adopted the thoughts of Casey (1996) according to which the lived experience takes place through a sentient, affective, knowing, and moving body of an individual who perceives things through personal qualities and reflections. Emotions were considered as evident parts of the perceiving process since emotions move the sentient body as well as connect the sentient body to things, places, and others (Ahmed, 2004, pp. 27–31). Thus, specifically, the parts of autoethnographic accounts where emotions, senses, feelings, embodiment, and expressions referring to one's meaning-making process (see Schorch, 2014), as well as parts of narratives describing the phenomenon in a fundamental and revealing manner (Van Manen, 1990, p. 93), were analyzed in the light of hermeneutic phenomenology.

The findings indicate that the process of perceiving Otherness on-site can be complex as well as multifaceted in lived dark proximity tourism experiences. Mental escape, however, seemed to be the key to perceive Otherness. The knowledge regarding the representations of death influenced the way how the place was perceived during the lived experiences and what kind of details attracted interest. The physical aspects played an important part in endorsing the place identity built prior to the experiences even though during the second lived experience, the Otherness derived from physical aspects had somewhat eroded or evened. Ideologically attributed differences and linkages to the Old Church Island Cemetery seemed to, however, remain considerably firm. Attributing differences ideologically in one's proximate environment may be a far-reaching process that shapes the place identity of a place and thus influences the lived dark proximity tourism experience. If a place holds significant value and is for example a source of local myths and legends, locals can be sentimental and affective towards the place (Miller & Rivera, 2006, pp. 334–335).

In dark proximity tourism it can be rather challenging to trace the source of exact origin of the emotions or to predict what kind of emotions the lived experience evokes in the end. Dark tourism sites are experienced subjectively, and myriad different meanings and perceptions, thus exist (Light, 2017, p. 281). Craig and Thompson (2012, p. 183) argue that a person's past, connection to the event under scrutiny, the traveling company as well as personality influence the dark tourism experience. Also, time and reflection can re-shape one's understanding of past events. This, as well as the reflections of this study, implies that the dark proximity tourism experience is multifaceted and offers opportunities for continuous discovery and various emotional experiences. After all, humans are dynamic beings. Cemeteries itself can be considered as out of ordinary spaces since they are multifaceted, dynamic, mythic, and meaning-laden spaces that encompass both historical and contemporary dimensions (see Foucault, 1986). Leaving room for contemplation in favorable conditions in cemeteries may enable perceiving Otherness through contemplation of death and meaning of life itself.

Dark proximity tourism experiences at cemeteries can be multifaceted and encompass various relations with death as well as offer voluminous and meaningful experiences. Through adopting a different mindset (see Diaz-Soria, 2016) and attributing difference ideologically (see Seaton; 2009) a cemetery in one's proximate surroundings can turn into a place where Otherness can be experienced, and tourism practices implemented. This master's thesis process proved to me that turning the gaze towards the proximate environment while adopting a different mindset may not be for vain. Interesting stories waiting to be discovered linger all around us. Discovering them might nevertheless require effort and dedication to the matter.

6.1 Evaluation of the study

The scientific knowledge this autoethnographic study produces has limitations since the study is constructed around personal experiences. Jones et al. (2013, p. 26) have rather aptly argued that humans are dynamic, unpredictable and constantly changing beings, and knowing with full certainty what others do, say, or do is out of our capabilities regardless of the methodology. Qualitative research, however, offers a way to appreciate contingencies and unique experiences.

Through autoethnographic insights, others can make sense of similar experiences (Adams et al., 2015, p. 27). Autoethnography as a method does not argue to be more generalizable, reliable, or valid than any other method but rather autoethnography seeks to offer alternative ways to approach cultural experiences (Jones et al., 2013, p.33). Furthermore, in hermeneutic approach biases and assumptions of the researcher are not dismissed but they are rather an integral part of the interpretative process in which the position and experience relate to the fact of being researched (Lavery, 2013, p. 28). The study should be, thus, rather thought and valued as an account contributing to existing proximity tourism and dark tourism studies through its endeavor of providing personal, nuanced, and reflective insights (see Adams et al., 2015).

According to Ellis et al. (2011, p. 282–283) validity, reliability, and generalizability are applied to autoethnography in an altered context and meaning. In autoethnography, the reliability of the research is linked to the credibility of the narrator and coherency of the narratives. The validity of the autoethnographic study, on the other hand, depends on the capability of the narrator to evoke feeling that the depictions are truthful. Generalizability is linked to the reader and how the reader determines the generalizability (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 751). That is, in autoethnography distinguishing internal knowledge from external knowledge is not often feasible (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008, p. 452). The study aimed to create nuanced, reliable, and valid depictions of the phenomenon in the light of hermeneutic phenomenology and thus, to describe the phenomenon and the world just as I personally realize them. Thus, to ensure validity, reliability, and generalizability of the research, I sought to write evocative, understandable, and coherent accounts while sharing my own worldview and thoughts with the reader.

6.2 Suggestions for further research

Cemeteries offer a tremendously wide and interesting area for proximity tourism studies as well as dark tourism studies in many ways. This autoethnographic study has only scratched the surface of cemetery tourism by following my own ways of practicing cemetery tourism with certain limitations set by the non-existing tourist infrastructure at the cemetery under scrutiny. Cemeteries reflect various levels and times along with evolving constantly (Tanas, 2004). Digital afterlife, digitalization of cemeteries as well as the dynamic nature of

cemeteries offer countless interesting possibilities from the perspective of dark tourism. In the contemporary world, the digital afterlife has become more common and different online memorial sites are utilized to preserve the remembrance of death. Moreover, different online sites to find locations of graves as well as to remembrance death have been developed (e.g. Find A Grave). Utilizing the multifunctional use of cemeteries calls, however, for further knowledge, regulating, respect towards the essence of cemeteries, and considering cultural aspects (Nordh & Evensen, 2018).

Long term spiritual and transformative effects of dark proximity tourism on individuals were out of the scope of the thesis. A systematic study concentrating on spiritual and transformative effects of dark proximity tourism on the individual in the long term could provide valuable insights and demonstrate benefits as well as the potential of practicing dark proximity tourism.

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